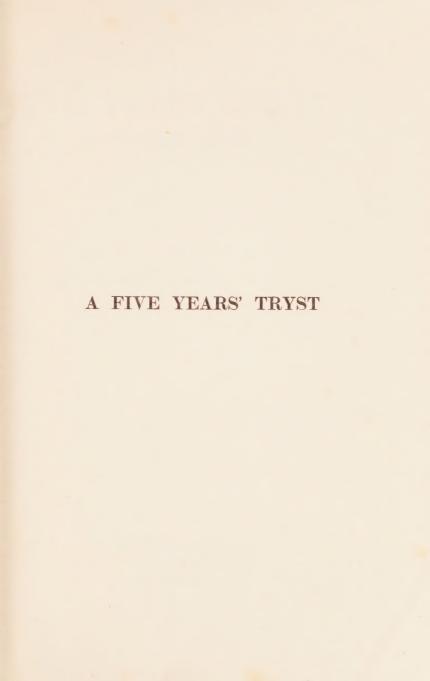


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A

FIVE YEARS' TRYST

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

SIR WALTER BESANT

"ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN" "THE ORANGE GIRL"

ETC. ETC.

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A FIVE YEARS' TRYST

PROLOGUE

IN THE KEEP

THERE was nothing left of the Castle except the keep and part of a tower. Outside there was no trace of mound or earthwork or moat, or any outworks. Perhaps there had never been anything at all except the keep and the small tower which stood over the gateway. That might be one reason why the walls were twelve feet thick. They were of rubble and flint, and, looking at them, one asked how they had ever been persuaded to fall down, and what had become of all the rest. The broken walls stood roofless, with yawning holes where the beams had been placed, still twenty or thirty feet high, enclosing what had once been the inner chambers, one above the other, of the stronghold. In the lower part there were vaulted recesses which made one think of prison-cells; in one of these had been placed a bench and a rough table; in another were preserved the pillory and the stocks once belonging to the town adjacent; in a third was a stone coffin dug up somewhere in the neighbourhood. The floor of the keep was now a carpet of turf; a broad opening, where the wall had been completely removed, gave access.

The walls were clothed with flowers and creepers. Outside, the ivy clung in thick masses; where there was no ivy, wild-flowers took root and flourished. There were kiss-me-quick with its red blossoms, and the green pellitory with its tiny blossom, the wallflower on the top of the ruined walls; beside the wallflower long grasses-things of rare beauty and delicate colour; on a slope of broken rubble grew a young seedling ash; on another slope a crab-apple in blossom; and on the side clung the yellow stonecrop. Outside the keep, to the west, stood a noble church, with its tower and spire, in the midst of a broad churchyard filled with venerable tombstones, which preserved the memory of none, because the names could no longer be deciphered, but reminded the living, if they chose to open their hearts and lift up their eyes, of the dead who had gone before—a wholesome reminder. On the south, beyond a meadow, the town began; but there was no "roar" of industry and trade; no grinding of waggon-wheels; no hammering of anvils; no shouting of men; a quiet and peaceful little country town where nobody made anything, and, except on market-day, nobody sold anything. On the east lay fields, and beyond the fields rose a long, low ridge of hill. On the north side, close to the keep, stood a red-brick Elizabethan house; a stately, spacious house, with square windows and gabled roof; a sunny, warm, and beautiful house; a house where there should be a gracious and dignified châtelaine. The turf grew up to the very walls of the house; wisteria, jessamine, Virginia creepers hung upon the walls, but not to hide them altogether; and on the grass were lilac, ribes, and all kinds of flowering shrubs.

And it was all so quiet, save for the things that

mark the silence: the skylark above, the distant call of the cuckoo, the joyous note of the blackbird, the cry of the swifts from the steeple, the counting of the passing quarters from the church clock, the sheep-bell from some pasture-land, and the rustling of the ivy-leaves, in the light wind of the early

summer day.

It was all so quiet: the birds flew about the ruins, too much occupied with their own affairs to think about anything else; within the fallen walls wandered, unseen and unsuspected, the ghosts of knights and fair ladies who had once lived here in chambers dark and gloomy save for the light that flashed from arms and armour on the walls. They come and go, these ghosts; they do not see the ruins; for them the Castle stands strong and masterful, dominating the town; they sit within, the lords and dames; they do not find the chambers dark and narrow; the place is not gloomy to them; it is their palace; it is their home. Let them come and go unobserved; we have nothing to do with ghosts of the long-buried past. Mine are the ghosts of to-day, which is already yesterday; mine is the present; mine are the moments which are even now flying from us. See! we catch a few and give them a resting-place in these pages; they make pictures for us, such as those that we borrow from the sunshine and imprison in a box.

The place was as quiet as if one stood in the middle of Dartmoor; as quiet as a tarn in the recesses of the Welsh mountains. The time was afternoon, an afternoon in early June, the sun slowly declining with the warmth of August and the freshness of May, a day when one is inclined to swear, by the sacred memory of the ancestors who made lovely ruins for us, that there is no climate

like the English, and no loveliness of country, no sweetness of air, no fragrance and colour of flowers and of blossom, no azure of sky, to compare with the gifts and graces of such a day in this realm and

isle of England.

Suddenly the quiet was broken; suddenly, but not disagreeably, because there is always a musical note in children's voices. For the door of the great house was thrown open and three children came running out—two boys and a girl. The girl was a damsel with the long fair hair that we of this island love: the boys carried each a stick made into the rude semblance of a sword by tying a cross-piece of wood which furnished the hilt; each had on his left arm a square piece of wood tied with string; this made a shield.

They ran—the boys shouting, the girl laughing—across the road; they entered the ruined keep.

"Now," said one of the boys, "this is going to be a big thing. You won't often see a deadly combat like this. You're the Queen of the Combat, Nell. You sit there. You might be the imprisoned maiden, but"—he looked doubtfully at the pillory and the stocks—"I never remember any of them being in pillory while her champions fought for her. You'd better sit on the bench there. That's your throne. We are going to fight for you, remember, Nell. All you've got to do is to throw down your glove and say, 'On, valiant knights! And God defend the right!"

"Come on. Let's get to the fighting," said the

other boy impatiently.

"We've got to have names. You're Sir Brian.

"Never mind the names. Come on. Look out, Nell! I'm going to make the feathers fly."

He rushed upon the foe without waiting for further preface. It was indeed a terrific combat; the shields were tough, and they received without flinching the most tremendous cracks; arms and legs came in for unguarded ones; the swords flew like lightning; the combatants leaped and sprang at each other, and retreated and pressed on and retreated again, and shouted as they fought. And the joy of battle arose in their faces, which began with laughing, and now became set and resolute. It was a duel in earnest, in which the boys whacked each other with their sticks as if they had been players at single-stick for a prize at a fair. Their language—for they were not silent—was hardly knightly. Instead of crying "On, St. Denis!" "On, St. George!" they invited each other to enjoy the thwacks. "That had you, Frank!" "How'd you like that, Jack?" "There's a nasty one!" and so on.

The girl looked on, seeing the game, but not the joy of battle in its reality. And when one slipped and fell, and the other planted his foot upon his shoulder and cried, "Yield or die!" and the fallen knight cried, "Death rather than dishonour!" which was all in the play, the girl clapped her hands and laughed, and rose from her throne and said that it had been a gallant fight, and that Jack, being defeated, must give in, but that he should have his life spared.

"Now, Neil," said the victor—but this was not in the play—"I've beaten him, and you've got to marry me. Remember, you belong to me now! I've won you—what is it?—on the awestruck field."

"The stricken field, you donkey!" said the other. "My foot slipped; and you haven't played as we arranged,"

"Oh, never mind what we arranged! We had a good fight, and I won the prize. It's all right. You shall marry somebody else. Me and the Queen will give you a yard and a half of gold

chain. I'll chop it off myself."

The conqueror was a boy of about ten, strong and well made, of a ruddy countenance and comely. One of his eyes was adorned with a darkish ring about it, one of those rings which were common in the days when Corinthian Tom and his friend Jerry roamed the streets at night; it indicated a recent encounter. The boy had, in fact, a friend in the town, a boy employed by a butcher, with whom he sometimes unbent, so to speak, in a meadow. He had also a small red scar on his cheek, the result of a gunpowder accident; and the top of the little finger of his left hand had vanished, leaving not a wrack behind. In a word, the boy was one of those adventurous spirits for whom life is full of incidents. Some boys go through school and through life with no incident at all, and no excitement. This boy got the full flavour out of the world by a succession of rows, fights, scrapes, adventures, and accidents. progress through school was marked by daily rows; he was generally imprisoned after hours; he had many enemies, whom he loved deeply and fought continually; he was always having accidents. Sometimes as a child he climbed up high trees and had to be fetched down by the aid of a ladder; sometimes he fell into deep ponds; he came home covered with mud whenever he went out with clean things; he always tore his clothes to pieces whenever they were new; he laughed in church; he cheeked big boys; every implement used in modern punishment was turned upon him. "You spoiled it all—didn't he, Nell?" said the other, rising. "I told you what to say. You didn't talk a bit like a knight."

"It was a very fine fight," said Nell.

The vanquished boy shook his head, dissatisfied. "No rules," he said. "When knights fought there were the rules—like a game. You just said, 'Come on!' as if you were fighting Tom, the butcher's boy."

"All right, Jack," said the other cheerfully. "We'll have a tournament next time, and you shall

lay down the rules."

There are some boys who carry on their faces from childhood the stamp of bookishness. I believe that you can see it in the very cradle if you know what it is. Jack was the boy of books. He it was who invented the games and made up the plays for the rest to act; they were knights and noble ladies; they were pilgrims; they were men-at-arms; they were whatever this boy invented; and whatever he invented he took out of books, for he was always reading. A boy of slighter build than the other; his shoulders not so broad, his head not so square, his carriage not so aggressive and not so confident.

All through that afternoon of June the children played; presently a maid came out of the house with a tray, and they had tea on the table in the keep. After tea they put Frank in the pillory for another game, and Jack became the headborough who stood beside the prisoner until Nell begged him off. Presently the sun went down; the keep became very dark and rather cold; and it was

time to go home.

As for Frank, he lived in the great house. "Mind!" he said, "we fought for you, Nell, and I

won." The other two walked away together, taking hands. They lived in the town. It was, as one might have guessed from the silence, a very dull and quiet place indeed. There was a High Street, which ran along one side of the town, as if it had nothing to do with it; a broad highway with a few shops and one or two large houses, so large that they seemed out of all proportion to the town. Jack belonged to one of these, that with the brass plate on it—Mr. J. A. Aylwin, Physician and Surgeon. But he turned out of the High Street with his companion into the town itself, which consists of half a dozen side streets and a Market Place.

In the soft summer twilight the Market Place looked picturesque and even mediæval. The Town Hall is a timbered structure, gabled, supported as to the front part upon square pillars; there was a restored cross, now a drinkingfountain, in the middle, which in the subdued light looked mediæval. Two or three stalls had been left standing. The old inn at one corner, with its shell decoration over the door and its great bunch of gilded grapes hanging out from a sign, might have been the Boar's Head, Eastcheap, so ancient did it look. The shops were shut and the streets were deserted; there was no sign of life in the place except the lighted windows of the inn, with the red curtain behind and an occasional light in an upper window.

The two children crossed the Place hand in hand and silent. Twilight is a ghostly time to an imaginative child; it fills his brain with thoughts; it turns trees into giants with outstretched arms, and houses into castles, and open doorways into

caves.

Presently they came to an old, old house—the oldest house in the town—very likely the oldest house in the country. The front was covered with plaster, and crossed with ancient worm-eaten beams; the upper storey projected; the two gables projected still more; the front of one gable was adorned by two strange figures in plaster, one armed with a sword and spear, the other carrying some kind of club; the entrance was a large square open way, big enough for a covered waggon, and within was a courtyard. The windows were casement, with diamond panes in leaden setting. The lower windows were lit up. The house was locally known as Oliver Cromwell's House, but it was a great deal older than his time.

"Good-night," said the boy.

There was a broad gateway leading into a courtyard where was the private entrance to the house. The door opening to the street was adorned with a square brass plate, on which was an announcement to the effect that this was the office of Mr. Emanuel Osbert, Solicitor and Commissioner of Oaths. This was the girl's home; in this ancient house she was growing up. If you think of it, a child brought up in such a house, where every room is full of the past, must look upon this world more seriously than one who lives in a villa of yesterday or to-day. For the latter everything is just beginning; the world is ready-made to her hand; for the former everything is a continuation. For the latter the future is a kind of lucky-bag; for the former the future has been prepared by the past and is shaped by the present. There are advantages, and perhaps disadvantages, in either position. For my own part I would choose the old house in the old town with the old ruins and the old church.

CHAPTER I

THE SOCIETY OF THE GENTLEMEN OF ATHELSTON

THE ancient and venerable Society of the Gentlemen of Athelston met every Wednesday evening between October 1 and March 31. The place of meeting was Oliver Cromwell's House, the house of the President, Mr. Emanuel Osbert, Solicitor, Notary, Commissioner of Oaths, Coroner, Town Clerk, Clerk to the Justices, to the School Board, to the Guardians, and to the Vestry.

The Society was of such antiquity that its origin was unknown. It possessed no records; the members passed away and their Proceedings or Transactions were unknown. By some it was held that the Foundation was Elizabethan, for the encouragement of Poetry in that poetical age: by some that it was founded by Cavaliers during the Commonwealth, nominally for the Advancement of Learning, Poetry, Music, and the Fine Arts, but really for the maintenance of the loyalist spirit. Both traditions had the flavour of Learning, and this Society was certainly created for the Gentlemen of the town alone, because none but Gentlemen cultivate Learning, Poetry, Music, and the Fine Arts. There were no literary productions that could be adduced as the outcome of the Society. Even a Ballad to the eyes of Cynthia would have been something; or even a Gregorian Chant. But the town had no poets, no musicians, no distinguished persons of any kind, to boast of.

In the eighteenth century, when cards were the one recreation of the country town on winter evenings, the Society naturally played cards. They began with Ombre; they went on to Quadrille; then to Long Whist; and lastly to Short Whist. Something of the old form was maintained. The Society met at six—but in this old town everybody still dined in the middle of the day—and stayed until ten. At that hour the Society went downstairs to supper, which always consisted of cold chicken and ham, with a bottle of port. After supper the daughter of the house brought in with her own hands a bowl of that old-fashioned

brew called punch.

There were only four members in the Society. These were the Vicar, who was also the Archdeacon; Sir Peter Elsing, whose Bank had branches in all the country towns within a radius of twenty miles; Mr. Emanuel Osbert, the life President of the Society; and Dr. Aylwin. According to ancient usage and tradition, no other residents in the town were considered as qualified: the Manager of the local Branch, the two Curates, the Master of the Grammar School were not Gentlemen within the ancient limitations. Fortunately, there were no authors, actors, architects, painters, sculptors, actuaries, or merchants in the town, so that the question of their right to be considered Gentlemen did not arise. Divinity, Land, Law, Medicine, the Services—these included formerly all the Gentlemen in the country.

The name of Sir Peter Elsing is familiar to everybody. His famous Bank, which the country folk believed to be safer than the Bank of England; his privilege of issuing bank-notes, which the farmers preferred to those of the larger institution; his wealth; his leading in the country and the town—where he was President, Chairman, Governor, or

Patron of every foundation or society; his philanthropy, which in the direction of Reformatories, Penitentiaries, and similar associations was unbounded; his personal austerity; his known opinion as to the true meaning of Justice, that it demanded punishment first and mercy only after repentance; the application of these principles to the army of accountants and clerks in his branches, so that debt, fast living, frivolity, and even lightness of conversation were certain to be followed by the sack:—all these things combined naturally created a profound respect for Sir Peter, and made his clerks, if he was within a dozen miles, to outward

show, a regiment of undertakers.

Stories were whispered—but not in any branch of the Bank—about his austerity and his pride. To local managers he was reported to extend the favour of two fingers; an unbending back - Sir Peter's Poker was proverbial—awaited those of lower rank. Perhaps his pride was natural, considering his position and his power; there is no pride like that of the local magnate; no exclusiveness like that of the secluded county family. Sir Peter was not only a country gentleman, but he was also Head of a great and powerful Bank; he commanded a large number of employés; he was made to feel, while still a young man, that he was a person of very great importance, whose words were commands, and whose opinions, like the Thirty-Nine Articles, had to be matters of simple faith for his people. At the same time, it was perfectly well known that Sir Peter could not be considered as a person of commanding intellect. Probably he knew or suspected this himself. And the knowledge, or even the suspicion, would aggravate his pride.

In appearance he was tall, thin, and long-visaged. Perhaps his resemblance to the late Earl of Shaftesbury was due to his possession of the same qualities of philanthropy, justice, and austerity. The weekly rubber of whist was his only relaxation; it was allowed by his conscience as a tribute of respect to his ancestors, also Gentlemen of the town of Athelston.

It was with the whole town a matter of continual surprise that a divine of the learning and ability of the Archdeacon should be overlooked by those who had the appointing of the Bishops. He was the ideal Churchman; tall and portly, dignified, decided in his views, speaking with authority; loud-voiced; hospitable - the garden parties, the dinner-parties, the open house offered by the Archdeacon to the clergy and the county people made him a leader: he wore his Archidiaconal hat with the button and the cord with as much dignity as any Bishop could wear his apron. He had the reputation in the town, if not among his clerical brethren, of profound learning. Certainly his library contained a good many folios; he had not published anything, but that was proof of a superiority to mere vulgar fame; his sermons were oracular. He was understood to be waiting for a Bishopric. Yet, curiously, he remained an Archdeacon.

On a certain evening in early October the Society was gathered together. At one end of the long, low drawing-room stood the card-table with a pair of wax candles—the Gentlemen of Athelston could not endure gas or that latter abomination of electricity; on the mantelshelf stood two more wax candles; on the piano at the other end stood other two wax candles.

The game was proceeding - every man intent upon his hand. When four people play together regularly they put on mannerisms; they acquire a certain character and distinctive style which they unconsciously develop. Sir Peter, for instance, played according to rule-he went by Hoyle. The Archdeacon, as one entitled to an independent judgment, disagreed with Hoyle on some points one has to be an Archdeacon at least before one can disagree with authorities. The Doctor was remarkable for strategic audacity and for a fondness for finesse which generally disconcerted his partner and led him astray. The President was believed to remember every card that was out: this made him the referee when a game was played over again in discussion.

Round the fireplace were sitting three or four

elder ladies conversing quietly.

At the piano was a group consisting of the same three young people whom we have seen already. But they had grown up; the boys were past twenty; the girl was eighteen. They were talking and playing and singing—the Society not objecting to this disturbance of the quiet due to the game.

"It's all settled," said one of them; Frank—the hero of a thousand fights. "I'm to go up to the London Branch next week. Well, I've had two years of the local Branch, and a change is something. I'm to live on a hundred a year—two pounds a week and find yourself." He laughed. "It's what I was born to; some fellows have the luck to knock about the world a bit, before they settle down. The desk and the bank counter are for me."

"Lucky for you that you've got a comfortable bank," said the other.

"You think so, Jack. If I were clever I'd change places with you. When we're both fifty you'll be a great man of science and I shall be nothing but a country banker."

"Humph!" said Jack doubtfully, "the Bank is a

certainty—the Great Man is doubtful."

They preserved the same characteristics and the same differences as in boyhood. One was the man of action, in appearance; the man of enterprise and adventure; who was bound to a desk at a bank. The other was the man of books. He wore a pince-nez, having developed short sight; he was slighter than his friend, but still well built; he looked as if his world was to be a laboratory and a library.

Both the boys talked this evening as if under some embarrassment; both, when they looked at the girl from time to time, changed colour—at twenty, if I remember aright, one can still blush

quite prettily.

The girl increased the embarrassment by an explanation. Under the circumstances, it was an unusual manner of offering explanations. But she did it. First she glanced round the room; nobody was heeding them, looking at them, or listening to them. The situation, however, prevented any

remonstrance, protest, or discussion.

"Both you boys," she said, speaking very low, "are going away to-morrow. Both of you made the occasion an excuse for saying the same thing"—she looked from one to the other—"exactly the same thing to me. I told you both that I would give you an answer before you go." The young men started, reddened, and glared at each other. "But you must remain friends, you know, if you are to be friends of mine. And as for my answer—it

is this." They bowed their heads to listen. "You are only two boys; you have no right to think of such things for a long time to come. You have got your work to think of. Come back if you should continue in the same mind on your twenty-fifth birthday"—they had the same birthday—"on the 15th of May 1900. Then you shall tell me what you have done in the five years, and—and—if you like to put the same question you shall hear my answer. Hush! That is enough. The Society is rising."

There was no time for the young men to reply, or to speak. They heard with flaming cheeks, and

perforce were silent.

The girl closed the piano; the clock struck ten. Just in time. "Double, treble, and the rub," said the Archdeacon. "As usual, Doctor, your finesse was a little too strategic."

They paired off and went downstairs to supper,

the two boys going last, with very red faces.

After supper Nell left the table and the room, and presently returned. A maid went before her bearing two more candles; she herself carried in her arms a noble and capacious bowl steaming, with its silver ladle sticking out hospitably. And a maid followed with glasses. The little ceremony had an old-world flavour which was agreeable even to those accustomed to it. There never was such a recipe for brewing punch as that preserved by the Society of the Gentlemen of Athelston. It was contained in a household book, a MS. of the year 1710, with the "e's" and the "o's" very much alike; a book composed entirely by a great-great-grandmother when all the world was young.

When the glasses were filled the President rose. "Gentlemen of the Society and of the ancient town

of Athelston, let us drink to the memory of our predecessors." It was the one toast of the Society, and it was received in solemn silence.

"It is a Privilege," said the Archdeacon, raising his glass again and looking at the ambrosial liquid with eyes of affection, "a rare and unwonted Privilege—I trust that we are sufficiently grateful for it—to carry on an ancient custom and preserve the traditions of a venerable Society"-he spoke as if the history of the Gentlemen of Athelston was a record of illustrious achievements and distinguished men-"to go back a hundred and fifty years and, like our predecessors, to sit round a Bowl of Punch. 'Tis a grateful compound perfected by the wisdom of our ancestors. When we are gone, young people, it will be your task to carry on these traditions. You will become the Society. We shall bequeath to you the weekly meeting for the Transaction of Business"—this was the rubber-"the adjournment for refreshment; the old Port-yours, Mr. President, is worthy of the Society; the old Brew-Ah!" He lifted the glass to his lips—his voice dropped slightly—"the old Country—and the old Faith."

CHAPTER II

THE LONELY DIGGINGS

In a room upstairs, looking out upon back premises, roofs, and chimneys, sat a young man, alone. He was a medical student; he lived at some distance from the Hospital; he had as yet made few friends among the students; outside the

Hospital, he knew not one single person in the whole of this vast London; there was not one single house at which he might call; there was not among all the millions of the city a man or a woman who had ever heard of him. This young man was living on a slender allowance; his "diggings" consisted of a single room, which was both bedroom and study. He dined every day at a cheap restaurant, and he took breakfast and anything else at an unpretending coffee-house. In the evening he sat at his table and "mugged up" bones till it was bedtime.

I have sometimes had a vision in which twenty or thirty millionaires—there are really quite as many in the world, somewhere or other-meet together and resolve to do something considerable for the good of their fellow-creatures. In my vision they are reasonable millionaires, who talk the matter over and are unanimous in their conclusions; they pass in review the things that have been done for the people; the schools, the endowments of scholarships, the polytechnics, the settlements, the almshouses, the hospitals, the associations for the relief of every form of disease; the refuges, the reformatories, the doss-houses, the prisons, pillories, whackings, hangings, everything. They are agreed that what is done for the aged is done for men or women who have been failures; that failures are mostly the inevitable consequence and punishment of extravagances in youth; that the workhouse should be the natural haven for age in failure; that for middle-aged failure some form of lenient prison, with hard labour, would be the proper treatment, and that whatever should be done by them should be devoted to the benefit of the young and the prevention of failure. If, they

agree, we can keep the young people out of mischief we shall deplete the workhouses and contract the prisons to a few cells. These millionaires seem to me eminently reasonable. There are young people by the million—students, clerks, shop assistants, employés of all kinds; thousands of them come up from the country and are comparatively friendless in London; they are cast alone and unprotected upon the world. "Let us," say the benevolent millionaires, "befriend this class, which wants every kind of help we can provide; we will erect colleges all over London, dotted here and there; colleges for the residences of such young people: in one, students; in another, typewriters; in a third, clerks; and so forth, recognising degrees and levels that are dear to them: we will make for them places where they may lead the associated life guarded by their occupations, pursuits, and their friends from the dangers and snares of the streets and the town. All the things that tempt outside, music, dancing, acting, society, shall be found for them at home."

This is my vision. It is an ambitious dream; but it is persistent. The millionaires have not yet done it, and I do not hear of that conference as one of the fixtures of the season. If, however, they will not do it, perhaps companies may be formed to create such colleges; build them in handsome structures, with halls and libraries and gymnastic rooms, and let them to young men at a price and get dividends out of them, so that when they enter the pearly gates, which are always open to the charitable, they may feel that they have left a large balance at the bank, while they have earned the blessings of the young whose lives they have enriched and enlarged and saved from wreck.

The Solitary sitting in the two-pair back was the medical student from Athelston, Jack Aylwin. The room was very quiet; it was in a house belonging to one of the backwater streets lying north of Holborn: it was a street of large and handsome houses which had once been the residences of wealthy people; especially of judges, successful lawyers, and fashionable physicians. These all went away. The street descended in the social scale; the large houses were next occupied by solicitors who wanted room for all their clerks: then these went away. The street is now tenanted by people of strange and doubtful professions; and by ladies who contribute to the sum of human happiness by letting lodgings. These rooms are not taken by the gilded youth of London; fashion and revelry no longer belong to the street. The lodgers are mostly the impecunious youth whose fortune has still to be made: by day the place has a deserted appearance; yet, with its broad doors and the high windows, it preserves an air of faded greatness: at night it is a very quiet street.

The house in which Jack had his lodging was filled with young men; but they were either out in the evening or they sat alone, each in his own room, as in the cell of a prison, and found the

silence horrible.

No house within a quarter of a mile of Holborn can, strictly speaking, be silent; there is always the rush and rumble of omnibuses and cabs; yet it is subdued by the distance; it is blended into a continuous, not unpleasing sound; one ceases to notice it, just as on the seashore one ceases to hear the lapping of the waves, and in a room one ceases to hear the ticking of a clock, and in the neighbourhood of a cascade one ceases to hear the

fall of the waters. So that the sound of the traffic in Holborn, if it was heard or noticed at all, helped to set off and to intensify the silence of the room.

The medical student sat with the book before him, wide open. But he was not reading; he was

listening to the silence.

This was the third week of his first term, during which, evening after evening, he had sat listening to the silence, and always with the book before him. On the stairs outside there was silence; in the room above there was silence; in the room below there was silence; in his own room there was silence. His ears, straining to hear the whole of the silence, ached with the effort; he longed and yearned for something to break it; for a footfall on the stairs; for the entrance of a friend. A scream of murder from the garret above would have been a relief; or an alarm of fire would have rejoiced him; a voice from the other world would have been an agreeable break.

How many young men are there who are visited, in hours of loneliness and of silence, by terrors of the supernatural? What is it they dread? Why do they dread things which if they were possible would not do them any harm? They know not; the terrors of the unseen world fall upon one unsought and unexpected; it is a real fear of an unreal and non-existing phenomenon; even those who know that it is unreal will feel this terror. If you find any who will own to it, they will confess to you that it is a truly horrible sensation; that it makes the flesh to creep, the cheek to grow pale, the hand to tremble; it makes one incapable of resistance or of argument; it suggests instant flight in the most rapid manner possible. It is a

thing so undignified that, as a rule, no one will own to it. One hears, on the other hand, men alleging with boastfulness that they would not fear to pass the night alone in an old country church filled with the dead of the village and their monuments. Perhaps; one would not impugn the courage of anyone; at the same time a quiet country church with the people all asleep in their graves is one thing, and a silent, solitary lodging in the heart of London, with no one to speak with, nothing to bind one to the active living world around, is quite another thing. I would as soon spend an evening alone in the British Museum, which is filled with terrors and ghosts, as in such a lodging.

Jack Aylwin, his book on bones open at a really picturesque page (richly illustrated), sat

listening with ears erect to the silence.

It was about three weeks since he had begun to listen in the solitude of those evenings which he credited with study. To every young man who listens long enough there comes a Voice of some kind or other. This evening a Voice came to him. He heard it quite plainly and clearly. It was a soft, persuasive, insinuating, even a musical voice. Every one of my readers except the very young must have heard such a voice, though not, perhaps, under quite the same conditions. It used words to this effect—" Here you sit alone and in discomfort; the silence and the solitude get upon your nerves; you cannot write; you listen perforce to you know not what. This place is no better than a prison. Outside is the life of the world, which you are forbidden to share. There are joys celestial and pleasures of which you know nothing. Pity it is to sit here and not even to know what goes on. Outside, if you do not share, you can look on. You may not go into the theatres, but you can see the crowd go in and the crowd come out; you may gaze upon the ladies in their loveliness as they get into their carriages; anything is better than sitting here in loneliness. Get up and go out into the world. Perhaps, after all, there may be adventures waiting for you outside; adventures come to the adventurous. There are sometimes

pleasures even for the penniless."

So the Voice ceased. There was no need of repetition, because the word had been heard and had gone home. The Voice, in fact, went downstairs to the room below, where was sitting-also in loneliness, listening to the horrible silence-a young fellow of the Theological Department at King's; and the Voice whispered much the same thing in his ear too; so that the student, who had the Judicious Hooker open before him, fell back in his chair and became a dreamer. He created a Palace of Pleasure, and put himself in it, and filled it—this student of the Theological Department with all kinds of things usually unconnected with the Judicious one. When the Voice left the twopair back, the silence fell again upon Jack's ears like a cascade—which is both cold and crushing. Then it became suddenly intolerable. Jack sprang to his feet. A deadly terror seized him, such a terror as I have suggested. He snatched his hat and rushed down the stairs. On the way he encountered his fellow lodger bent on the same errand. They were strangers; neither could say to the other, "The silence drove me out." So they opened the street-door together, and they went out taking different directions. As for Jack, he went westward with the stream of life, and the

noise was so great that he did not hear the Voice, which was now laughing as if in triumph, or, it

might be, in mockery.

He ought not to have listened to that Voice. We must acknowledge so much. At the same time, O my brothers! you have probably arrived at that age when the temptations of the joys of life have ceased to tempt. You have tried them all; they are very well; one would not disparage any of them; but in youth they are exaggerated; that is most true. Yet remember how they once tempted; how they once pulled you as with cords and wires; how it seemed as if, for a short plunge among the revellers, no price would be too great.

He turned his feet westward. The theological student went by accident northward, where he met nothing but the policeman, and presently returned somewhat sobered and a little ashamed of him-

self.

But Jack went westward.

CHAPTER III

A CONFESSION

A FEW months after that yielding to the seductions of a Voice, the two boys of Athelston were dining together at a cheap Italian restaurant in Soho, one of those establishments where they provide a dozen courses, with nothing to eat in any of them, for two shillings, generously throwing in half a bottle of Italian wine—that at half a lira.

The place, however, to the young conveys an illusion of Continental festivity; it suits slender purses; and the company is certainly flavoured with foreign extraction, as well as garlic. The two young men often dined together in this fashion. As they both had to live on allowances of exiguity, it was necessary to limit the cost of that feast to the bare *prix fixe*, without extras. However, the thing looked festive, and the room was bright and crowded, and there was a general air of cheerfulness; though, when the dinner was quite concluded, one felt inclined to tighten the belt.

The banquet was finished; the tiny cup of coffee

was drained; and cigarettes were lit.

"After all," said Frank, "it's a Barmecide meal, but one does get a sense of life and the world in a place like this. If we made believe very hard we might think it was somewhere in the Quartier Latin. I suppose that is the only place where a fellow can live in comfort on a hundred a year."

"It is ridiculous, Frank. It is absurd, with your expectations, to have to live on a hundred a year. What have you to do with petty economies?"

"The Pater is a Roman Pater. His will is Law. He says that I am to have a hundred a year. In a few weeks I shall be of age. Then, I suppose, I come into the little fortune left me by my mother. I don't know exactly how much it is, but I daresay an excuse will be made for cutting off the present princely allowance. Well," he sighed, "one must make the best of things. A clerk in the Bank—hours, nine to six; best behaviour; smiles forbidden; and a hundred a year—say two pounds a week; lodging, five shillings for a single room; twenty pounds for clothes and pocket-money; four shillings a week for washing; seven shillings a

week for breakfast and tea; that leaves sixteen shillings for dinner, lunch, tobacco, beer, wine, omnibus, and the penny paper. It's a tight fit, Jack."

"It is my case too. Not much left for amusements, is there? Very easy for a fellow to make an ass of himself and get into debt, isn't it?"

"Very easy. I've got my amusement, though, and it costs nothing, and it's very filling—not like this dinner of twelve courses and dessert."

"What do you call amusement?"

"I go to a boys' club—a club of lads, you know—and we have gymnastics and single-stick, and all kinds of games every night. It keeps us all off the streets, you see, the boys and the fellows who

go down there."

"You're a good fellow, Frank, and I wish you'd taken me with you six months ago to your boys' club—keeps you off the street, doesn't it?" He sighed heavily, and his face became suddenly twisted with a look of anxiety. Frank was watching a circle of smoke from his cigarette, and

observed nothing.

"In your case, Jack," he said, "tightness is temporary. You'll pass your exams. with distinction; you'll get appointments; you'll write things; you'll run up the ladder like—like the Captain of the Foretop. As for me, I've got to climb slowly, rung by rung, with the rest of the galley-slaves. The Pater says I'm to fill every office in the Bank. I'd change places with you, Jack, willingly."

"Would you? Not if you knew everything."
"What is the good of expectations? I want to

live—I want to feel that I'm a man, not a steel pen. I want to see the world and all that therein

is. The inside of a bank isn't the world. Sometimes I think I'll throw up the job and go away on my own account."

"I'd go with you, Frank, only that the old man

would have to suffer."

Frank looked at him curiously. "Why, Jack," he said, "what's the matter? Here am I thinking about nothing but my own troubles. What's the

matter? You look horribly worried."

Jack hesitated. He changed colour. He began; he stopped; he began again. At last he blurted it out. "I must tell you, Frank. I've been going to tell you a long time—but—well—the fact is—I was ashamed. You see, I've made the most awful ass of myself."

The words were simple; they are used by most young men at some juncture of their lives; because, somehow or other, and some time or other, most young men do become transformed

like Bottom.

In this case it was a story of a very common kind; all about a set of young gentlemen who lived at a greater rate of expenditure than their allowances warranted; who ordered things they could not pay for; played cards and lost more than they could pay; and, in other ways familiar to "L'Enfant Prodigue," ate up the corn in the blade. Quite a common story; only it threatened to ruin one of the young gentlemen at least. And the easy way out of it now proved the surest way into a worse plight. The Quagmire of Difficulty led to the Slough of Despair, and the only way out of that Slough seemed by a dark and noisome lane which led right into the Market Place of the City of Destruction.

Frank listened with sympathy enough - the

story appeals to every young man except the flabby and the gelatinous, because, you see, the temptation is always there, and to every young man the World of Pleasure does seem so very joyous and so very real. He also listened with increasing heaviness of heart because he, too, could see no way except by that lane into that Market Place.

"That's what I had to tell you," said Jack. "Don't ask me if I blame myself. Call me all the names you can pick up. Take and kick me. I wish you would."

"Oh, Lord!" said Frank, "what an ass you've

been!"

"Yes, yes. If you only knew the consolation it is to hear somebody else say that! Well now, Frank, what am I to do? You know our circumstances at home as well as I do. We're as poor as a G.P. in a small country town can be expected to be. My father's practice is not more than enough to keep up the house; it is only by the strictest economy that he can afford to keep me at the Hospital. As for being able to pay this money, it is quite out of the question. Yet if it comes to his ears he will pay it, if he has to sell his instruments and his books, and to starve for the rest of his life."

"Yes, he will. I know your father, Jack."

"How can I go home when the thing comes out? What am I to tell my mother? How can I explain?"

"Indeed, Jack, I don't know. It is a devil of a

mess."

"I could not remain here; I shall have to give up my work and my profession. What is left for me?" "I don't know. It is a devil of a mess," Frank

repeated.

"It all began with my living alone. You see, I knew nobody, and I had to sit by myself in that room of mine, and the loneliness got on my nerves. So one evening I went out, and got to know these fellows and their set. And that's how it began."

"I see." Frank listened mechanically. He was

thinking of some way out of the mess.

"I have had altogether no more than fifty pounds of the money-lender. And now the debt is a hundred and sixty-four. And it's running up all the time."

"I suppose he could proceed against you in a court of law—or against your father—but I don't understand these things. You've signed some paper or other, of course?"

"I've signed a dozen papers."

"He wouldn't let you have the money if you were not in his power. That is quite certain. He knows, I suppose, that you are the son of a pro-

fessional man in the country?"

"Yes—he knows that. At first he was going to let the thing lie over on what he calls easy terms—easy! Oh, Lord!—until I get through or get some money—or something. But now he says he can't wait."

"He means to come down upon your father. What security has a medical student to offer? His future career? Yours won't begin for another four years. It is your father who will have to pay. The man counted on that from the outset."

Jack groaned.

"You will have to tell him sooner or later," Frank insisted. "Better tell him now before the debt grows any bigger."

"He cannot pay all this money. He hasn't got it. It would cripple him to borrow it—besides, the horrible shame of it—I mean for me—having to confess the truth—it must all come out—what I wanted the money for and how I spent it! Frank, I believe that I am the most miserable creature in the whole world."

Frank sat up suddenly. His face cleared; he broke out into smiles; he laughed aloud. It was an unexpected thing that he should laugh at Jack's misfortune. And it seemed unkind. But he did laugh.

"I laugh, my boy, to think that we are making ourselves miserable for nothing. Why—I can set

this job right without any trouble at all."

"You, Frank? Out of your hundred a year?"

" No-not out of the allowance."

"Then you will go to your father and ask him for more money, and get into a row on my account."

"No—I shall not do that either."
"Well—what will you do, then?"

"I don't think I will tell you. Suppose you just go home to-night and say to yourself, 'That business is settled and done with'?"

"Suppose I do nothing of the sort! Look here, Frank, I am no going to let you in for a row on

my account."

"There isn't going to be any row. Never you mind how; you shall have those papers of yours back to-morrow evening. Now for the address of that old octopus of yours."

"Are you sure that you can manage without——"
He hesitated. Frank replied without waiting for

the completion of the question.

"Quite. He will know nothing whatever about it"

"Frank, I just hate myself. If it weren't for

those people of mine-"

Frank laid his hand upon his rival's wrist. "Old man, it would be too bad if you were to get into hot water over this foolish job while I could prevent it. We must start fair, you know. There's five years yet before us."

CHAPTER IV

A MERE FORM

THE money-lender sat in his inner office. Outside, two or three clients waited to see him. These silly sheep, seeking their own destruction by leaping over a wall, stood apart from each other, ashamed of being seen in the place, and betraying their anxieties by their restless movements and the agitation of their hands and the twitching of the face. One was a tradesman to whom the Bank would make no more advances: another was a lady novelist, who was ready to pledge her next book in order to pay her dressmaker's bill; a third was a young fellow of fiveand-twenty, who was anxious to sell his reversionary interests for a few months'-or weeks' -more of the prodigal's paradise. To him, too, had the Voice come in the lonely diggings. Frank sent in his card, and was surprised to find that he was admitted at once, although, as the last-comer, he ought to have waited his turn. Such is the magic of a name.

He was received by a well-dressed and portly gentleman, who half rose from his seat at a table covered with papers and motioned him to a chair.

"Mr. Francis Peter Elsing." He read the card. "Any relation, if I may ask, of Sir Peter Elsing?"

"I am his son."

"In—deed!" A curious smile stole over his face; a smile that might mean many things. He was a soft-spoken man. Nature had endowed him with a musical voice; his features were heavy, and his appearance, so far as study can make it, was that of the heavy father, or the benevolent father, or the father gullible. He wore rings and a heavy gold watch-chain; and doubtless, if he had thought of it, would have worn a gold chain of Esses. "In—deed!" he said, "I shall be pleased to consider your business, Mr. Elsing."

"You will perhaps understand that this visit is

strictly confidential."

"Everything within these walls is confidential. You are here, sir, so far as the world is concerned, at the bottom of the ocean."

"Very good. I come to you about a little

money difficulty."

"Yes—yes, a little money difficulty. Well, sir, I frequently settle this kind of trouble. You can confide in me as in an—an instrument. If it is a delicate business, I can generally quiet the threatener and I can buy off the claimant."

"Just so. However, it is not my own difficulty."

"Oh!" The Instrument's face fell. This, perhaps, would not be a case of keeping matters snug

and getting paid on both sides.

"You have a note of hand or a promissory note, or something of a purely personal character from my friend, Mr. John Aylwin, medical student at King's College Hospital."

"Mr. John Aylwin? Mr. Aylwin? I have so many clients." He opened a book. Yes, oh yes!—a trifling transaction. Mr. Aylwin is your friend."

"You advanced him fifty pounds and you want

a hundred and fifty, or something like that."

"More than that, I believe," the man replied, unabashed. "I have sent him a note to say that some arrangement must be come to immediately."

"You know, I suppose, that he is only just of

age; and that he has nothing?"

"My dear sir, do you suppose that I will advance money without knowing what I am about? I know as much as you can tell me about Mr. Aylwin. His father is a medical man in a country town; he hasn't got any money; in fact, he is as poor as a church rat. He cannot afford to pay, but he will pay. Your father's Bank, Mr. Elsing, will probably advance him the money with which to discharge his son's liabilities at five per cent. I couldn't afford, myself, to do it at that low figure. Very good, sir. I want that money repaid and without any further delay."

"I want delay."

"I very much fear, Mr. Elsing, that you are asking the impossible. For I must have that money. Why should I grant that delay—unless, perhaps, you see your way to make it worth my while?"

"If you go to Dr. Aylwin you will not only bring great unhappiness upon him and his house, for reasons that you may guess, but you will straiten him for life probably; and you will certainly ruin the prospects and spoil the career of his son."

"Dear sir, when you are a little older you will understand—you will be yourself in the money-

lending line, like your father and your grandfather, the first Baronet—that business has absolutely nothing to do with the happiness of people, or the straitening of people, or the ruin of careers. Briefly, I must have the money. You are a friend of Mr. Aylwin's. If you feel so much for your friend—who certainly is, according to you, in a tight place—why can't you take and pay the money yourself?"

"I haven't got the money."

"You haven't got the money? You—Sir Peter Elsing's only son! You haven't got a hundred and fifty pounds of your own?"

"Strange as it may seem to you, I have not."
"Then, sir, you have only to go to your London Manager and he will give it to you."

"If he did he would infallibly get the sack."

"Then you have only to go to-to-anyone in

my profession."

The money-lender's face, always of a sanguine complexion, assumed a more roseate hue. His eyes lit up; he became eager; he leaned across the table and whispered confidentially—"Mr. Elsing, if you take this business seriously, let me manage

it for you, my way."

Observe, at this point, as a moral to parents, that if Sir Peter had taken his son into confidence, instead of treating him as a junior in the outer office, Frank would have known that before a certain Royal Commission, Sir Peter had quite recently given evidence on the money-lending question—and that he had strengthened the case by certain anecdotes concerning this very money-lender's peculiar tortuosities. Further, that at this moment Sir Peter's solicitors, at Sir Peter's instigation, were in correspondence with this very money-

lender, concerning the defence of an action in which a young gentleman who had been fleeced objected to being skinned as well; and that there were going to be revelations of an interesting and very uncommon kind. In a word, that Sir Peter was the uncompromising enemy of all usurers in general and of this practitioner in particular. Had Frank known these circumstances, he would have sought other assistance and other advice.

"Let me," repeated the money-lender, "manage the business for you. I can fix it up in five

minutes."

"I want to get my friend free from the anxiety and the worry of it."

"Quite so—quite so. I can do it for you, I say,

in five minutes."

Frank hesitated.

"In a few weeks," he said, "I shall be of age. Now, on my twenty-first birthday my trustees will put me in possession of my mother's small fortune, consisting of a few thousands."

"A few thousands," the money-lender repeated.
"Fortunate youth! There is so much spending in a few thousands, if only young men knew their

way about."

"Very well. That money will be mine. My offer is to pay you what Mr. Aylwin owes you, or what you make out that he owes you. But you will have to wait till I get the money."

"Oh, that is your offer! Well, Mr. Elsing, that is a proposal. You will pay that money for your

friend?"

"I give you my promise," said Frank. "Will that do?"

"You are a complete stranger to me. How do I know that you are the person you call yourself?

Medical students are slippery customers. However, let me suppose that it is all right. You are Mr. Elsing, and you will have this money, say. Very good. A client of mine, only last month, after I had taken his word—a verbal assurance—was run over in the street and killed—by a hearse, it was. My loss was over £500."

"I see what you mean, of course. Well, I may be run over by a hearse too, or by a perambulator, or by anything else. Still, I think you may safely

take my promise."
"In writing."

"My promise ought to be enough."

"If you were not what I believe you to be, Mr. Elsing, a young gentleman of the strictest honour, our interview would terminate at this point." The money-lender threw himself back in his chair and slapped the table with his left hand. It is a gesture which means that an ultimatum has been arrived at.

"Well," said Frank weakly. "What do you

propose?"

"I say that, as a man of business, I am ready, on certain conditions, to accept your promise provided that it is written."

"What conditions?"

"It is a mere form—a mere form—only a kind of security. Come, sir, I am a business man—I am willing at some personal inconvenience to defer payment of this money for a consideration. But I can only do so if I receive a written obligation on your part, in order to secure myself against possible loss."

Frank was silent. The man was certainly in his right in guarding against possible loss and accidents. At the same time, to have dealings with this man

other than to pay the debt and have done with him

seemed a degradation.

He was young, remember. He had no experience of the seamy side. He thought that his name, as that of a wealthy house, and his promise, as that of a gentleman, would be enough to transfer the debt to his own shoulders without further trouble.

Yet, he now saw, the man was right. He must

guard himself against possible loss.

"As for possible fraud," said the man of money, as if he was a thought-reader, "I chance it. I take it that you are what you represent yourself to be. I will take your word and your signature."

"Very well. I will sign."

"Now you talk like a practical man. The amount for which Mr. Aylwin is liable"—he consulted a ledger, following certain ominous figures with his finger—"is, I find, at this moment £178, 4s. 10d."

"My friend said it was £165."

"That was some weeks ago. Money, as you ought to know, is like a plant; it grows of its own accord, and fructifies—fructifies. The amount is now one hundred and seventy-eight four ten."

"Next week it will be a thousand, I suppose."

"You wrong me, Mr. Elsing. In three months' time, when I shall expect you to pay me, it will be two hundred."

"Oh! let me sign and have done with it."

"Very good. Now here is a form—a mere form. I fill it up ready for your signature. Read it. You engage yourself to pay me £200 on this day three months. I, for my part, give you a receipt in full for all claims that I have upon Mr. Aylwin. Is that a fair exchange? I lose nothing; you gain

your friend's discharge, so to speak. Consider, on the other hand, what you lose if you refuse."

"You will keep this paper in your own hands?"
"Until it is redeemed, most certainly. Shall I ring the bell for my clerk to witness the signature?"

Frank took the paper. The man touched an

office-bell. The clerk came in. Frank signed.

"Now, sir, to show that I am dealing quite straight with you, I pay over to you" (here he opened a cashbox and extracted certain notes and gold) "the sum of £178, 4s. 10d.—here it is. Take the money into your own hands. Good. I now give you the papers connected with Mr. Aylwin's business—all the papers, with a receipt in full, which I here draw out—sign—and stamp. And you give me back the money I have lent you—so. There are your papers. Give them to your friend."

"Ha!" The man heaved a deep sigh. "I am to keep this paper in my own hands until it is redeemed. That is agreed upon. You will find me a man of my word. Well, sir, I am pleased to have had this opportunity of being of some trifling service to Sir Peter Elsing. Particularly pleased."

Frank retired. He was elated and pleased with himself to think that he had set his friend free; at the same time, he was annoyed—himself a bank clerk in esse, and a bank director in posse—at being personally concerned with a common money-lender. There was something in the man's manner at the close of their interview—an air of triumph when he snatched up the signed paper, a look of meaning when he expressed his satisfaction—which made him uneasy.

However, he made haste to post off the letter of

release. Jack was free. He had made an awful ass of himself; but he was free. Had Frank only known what a stupendous mess of it he had himself made, he would have felt very little elation and no kind of self-satisfaction.

CHAPTER V

THE CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION

THE money-lender sat alone, the signed promise before him, in meditation. His meditations were pleasing. In fact, he saw before him, at the trifling cost of a breach of confidence, a really formidable weapon of offence and defence. Sir Peter waged war upon the usurer, did he? Sir Peter would limit the rate of interest. Sir Peter would give courts power to limit the rate of interest. Sir Peter would defend and maintain actions in which he, the money-lender, claimed his rights—just because they were legal—would he?—would he? Thus this little bit of paper might be the most useful thing in the world. Providential, quite—this visit of Mr. Francis Elsing.

In the afternoon, his business done, he walked from his place, in the neighbourhood of the Strand, to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and called upon a certain firm of solicitors—a highly respectable firm—and

sent in his name to one of the partners.

"I have come," said the money-lender, "in consequence of this letter." He drew out the letter and showed it.

"Quite so. That is our intention."

"So I understand. The papers, however, are in

perfect order, and I warn you that you have no case."

"You will, I suppose, let us have the name and address of your solicitors? May I ask why you

have called?"

"All in good time. Now, sir, I happen to know that behind this action stands Sir Peter Elsing. You need not protest. I had it from my client himself. Sir Peter sent him to you. Sir Peter will of necessity pay the costs of the action. Sir Peter would give a good deal just to have me under cross-examination in the witness-box."

"You cannot expect me to make any reply to this statement. Nor can I discuss the matter with

you at all."

"I care nothing whether you reply or not. Sir Peter intends to make me confess a great many transactions in which I have charged a high rate of interest. In other words, Sir Peter—who told the Royal Commission a good many stories about me and my brethren—intends to make the usurer—the common shark—reveal himself in open court."

"Sir Peter has not informed me of his motives or his intentions. And, again, why have you called?"

The money-lender snorted. "I'll show you directly what I've called about. As for Sir Peter, you have known all along what is meant. His Bank advances money on safe securities at five per cent. What is he but a professional money-lender? Only he won't take risks. The people who come to me are the people to whom the Bank will advance nothing. They are young fellows who want to get rid of their money; and they are tradesmen who are at their wits' end for money;

and they are women who are in debt to their milliners."

The solicitor sat down with resignation, and

pretended not to listen.

"And they would all cheat the money-lender if they can. If I have to advance money on their personal bond—on wild-cat securities—my only safety is in my power to prosecute. Man! I must be paid for the risks I run!" He spoke passionately. He raised his voice.

"Pray, sir, pray!" said the solicitor. "This is very irregular. I cannot discuss these points. Will you kindly come to your business at once, if you

have any?"

"Sir Peter goes before the Royal Commission and plasters me with mud." (He was working up into a rage royal.) "He plasters and pelts me with mud. What would you do if you were me—"

"I couldn't be you."

"—and found yourself able to return the compliment?"

"Once more, sir-"

"I am coming to the point. I have a little communication to make. I shall go on with my action, and I shall win it. The worst you can do is to make me confess to sixty per cent., and you know it."

"Really, sir, I must request you—"

"Wait a minute. I shall go into the witness-box. I shall acknowledge that, under certain circumstances, I advance money at a very high rate—under certain circumstances—and my counsel will then cite a particular case, which I shall describe, and he will then call evidence to support that case."

"What has that to do with us?"

"Oh nothing! The witness will be Sir Peter Elsing's only son."

"Sir Peter Elsing's son?"

"Just so. Sir Peter's son. The young man came to me in a money difficulty. He wanted money at once. He wanted, to be exact, the sum of £178, 4s. 10d. If the money was not found immediately there would be shame and trouble brought upon a most respectable house—and ruin for the career of a young man. Do you understand?"

Observe that he distorted Frank's words to make them seem applicable to himself.

"Did you advance the money?"

"Should I have been such a fool as to refuse? He said he had no money himself; he said that if the Manager of the Bank advanced it he would get the sack. I gave him the money. In return he gave me this paper." He opened his pocketbook and took out the promissory note. "Read it—I will give you a copy."

The solicitor looked at it, and gave it back to

him.

"Dated to-day, I see. You have lost no time."

"I never do. Sir Peter will be grateful to me for letting him know——"

"He will indeed!"

"And the extravagance of his son will be checked,"

"Perhaps."

"And the action will be undefended."

"I don't know."

"And Sir Peter will at once redeem this paper. I promised his son that I should keep it until it was redeemed. So good is done all round."

"I don't know what Sir Peter will do."

"At all events, you know very well that the revelation of these transactions in open court, with the reasons for the high interest and the urgency of the case, will prove of some little annoyance to Sir Peter—Peter the virtuous, Peter the philanthropist, Peter the enemy and the persecutor of the money-lender—will it not? And it will not do his Bank a great deal of good, I should say. The Bank hasn't been doing very well of late. But that consideration will not have any weight, of course."

The solicitor preserved an unchanged counten-

ance.

"Well, sir, if that is all you came to say—it is all?—then, if you will allow me"—he opened the

door-" I wish you good afternoon."

For some time the solicitor sat in reflection. Then he arose and repaired to the office of the senior partner.

"So you think Sir Peter ought to be told?"

"Assuredly. The man will certainly do what he threatens. I do not think that Sir Peter can afford to have his son's name brought forward in this way—his only son and successor. To be sure the man is an outrageous cad; but there—what do you expect? What has the boy done?"

"I don't know. It's a mere trifle for the son of Sir Peter. I'm sorry for him, though. Frank is as pleasant a lad as lives, and there will be a most

awful row."

Next day the money-lender received a letter. Perhaps he would bring that promissory note to Lincoln's Inn Fields. He did; and he came away without it. There was no action, because his client's solicitors agreed to a compromise.

"But," said the money-lender, "I'm sorry for

Mr. Francis Elsing."

CHAPTER VI

SENTENCE AND EXECUTION

In the large room which is the outer office of Elsing's London Branch, the clerks sat in silence. Forty writing as one. It was a well-disciplined office, but to-day the silence was greater than usual, and the diligence was more marked, because Sir Peter himself was within, with the Manager. He walked in-say, rather, he stalked in-about three o'clock, glancing round as he passed through as if to see that everyone was at work. His appearance produced, as usual, much the same effect as that of a hawk hovering over a coppice full of singing birds. For, indeed, Virtue in her rigour when added to the power of the Boot or the Sack is a fearsome object to the young. And the Bank was full of wholesome traditions or histories as to the application of the Boot. Presently the Manager came out. The eyes of all followed him as he walked through the rows of clerks. Who was wanted? What had come out?

He stopped at Frank's desk. All breathed. Sir Peter, therefore, wanted only to speak to his

son.

Frank obeyed the summons. The Manager whispered as he went, "For God's sake, Mr. Frank, submit and explain. Submit and explain. Throw yourself at his feet. There's nothing else to be done."

"Why?" asked Frank. "What fat is in the fire now?" And there was no time for a reply.

Sir Peter was sitting in the Manager's chair at the Manager's table. The Manager took his place beside him, standing humbly, in appearance no more than a clerk waiting for orders. The lines of the chief's austere face were not more severely drawn than usual; nor was there anything unusual in the firm-set mouth or the upright carriage of the head. Perhaps, however, there was an increase of cold blue light in his eyes, an indication which Frank instantly recognised as one betokening great displeasure. During a childhood inclined to mischief, and a youth inclined to mirth, and an early manhood which found the world enjoyable, he had frequently encountered this sign, and never failed

to interpret it rightly.

He naturally fell to making a rapid survey of the immediate past—we know by the testimony of the poet Cowper how instantaneous may be this feat of memory. He remembered nothing that his father could disapprove. The pit of the theatre to which he sometimes repaired would probably be confused by his father, who was ignorant of things dramatic, with the Bottomless Pit. But his father knew nothing about any visits to that sink of iniquity. As for the mere form gone through with the money-lender, nobody knew anything about it, or could know it. Therefore, after this rapid reviewing the recent past, Frank stood before his father with a clear conscience. Yet he was absurdly like a boy standing before a severe schoolmaster, a delinquent before a meeting of Scotch elders, or a heretic before a Dominican Inquisitor. Something would have to be denied or explained if that gleam of hard, light blue meant anything.

"I have a word or two to say," Sir Peter began.
"May I beg you, Mr. Ellis"—he addressed the
Manager, who was offering to retire—"not to go.

I wish you to be present. I desire you—you alone, mind—to hear, in the confidence of the Bank, the reasons of action which might otherwise

appear to be harsh."

Mr. Ellis bowed humbly and retreated to the side of the table, leaving his chief in complete command, so to speak, of the situation. But he glanced at Frank as much as to say again, "Submit and explain. Submit and explain. Throw yourself at his feet."

"Now, sir!" (Frank straightened himself—a fine and handsome culprit he looked, without the least touch of fear, or any outward mark of guilt.)

"Now, sir!"

"I am waiting," said Frank, "to hear what you

desire to say."

"I come to the point without waste of words. There is a villain who has hitherto eluded the hands of justice; a bloodsucker who robs youth of their patrimony; an encourager of vice and folly; a beast of prey who hunts old men to the work-

house—a money-lender—a money-lender."

Frank started. A money-lender! Then his father knew. Who could have told him, except the man himself—a traitor and a liar? He started and changed colour. He became very red, and then turned pale. By an effort he pulled himself together, but not until his emotion had been observed and taken as a proof of guilt.

"You change colour; your face betrays your guilt." He paused, but Frank made no reply. He understood his fate, and he knew his father. Submission, even to throwing himself at the paternal feet, would be of no avail. He remained silent. That double-dyed villain of a money-lender!

"I resume," said Sir Peter. "There is a money-

lender, I repeat, whose methods and iniquities I have myself—I say, myself—exposed. Do you

hear, sir?"

For it seemed to the speaker as if, with every intention of producing an impressive scene, he was making no impression at all upon his son, who only looked him steadfastly in the face, and showed no further signs of any emotion whether of conscious guilt, or of shame, or of terror. Now, men of Sir Peter's narrow temperament on such occasions like to obtain the full flavour of their own Rhadamanthine justice. "Do you hear me,

"I am listening to every word you say." He was now beginning to wonder what would become of him. There was some excitement in the thought of a new world opening to him. For he saw before him, very clearly, inevitable sack.

"It is to this man—to this man—that you went the day before yesterday, during the dinner-hour, while your fellow clerks were innocently taking in nourishment for the afternoon labours, for the purpose of raising a large sum of money at a moment's notice."

He paused again. "May I ask, sir," said Frank, "how you became acquainted with this

"No, sir, you may not. I will answer no questions. The money was wanted for purposes of profligacy—whether a debt of so-called honour, or something else. It must be for some unworthy purpose, or you would have come to me."

"That is an assumption," said Frank, "which is hardly warranted by your general treatment of me in money matters."

"I will not bandy words with you; nor will I

ask you for any statement, which would be certainly a confession of turpitude. You went to this man-it was, I say, the day before yesterday; you represented to him that you wanted the sum "-he glanced at a letter in his hand—"of £178, 4s. 10d. immediately. You told him that if you could not raise this money without delay there would fall lasting shame and disgrace upon a certain house, and that the career of a young man would be ruined for life. Mine was the house—you are the young man, Silence, sir!"-Frank made as if he would speak-" I want to hear nothing. You also undertook, in order to get that sum, to pay fifty per cent. for the accommodation-fifty, Mr. Ellis-fifty per cent,!"-Mr. Ellis shook his head sadly-"and to pay him £200 in three months!! £200 in three months!!!" He looked about the empty room as if asking for the indignation of a multitude.

"You have told me," said Frank, "that you want

no words from me."

"You, my only son, my apparent successor in the Direction of this great Bank, the inheritor of a name which I have striven to keep spotless and honoured, have disgraced yourself by borrowing money of a low-class, disreputable usurer. You! You!"

Frank inclined his head. "Quite true," he said,

"quite true."

"I do not look for words of contrition," his father continued. "I do not ask for confession. I should regard sorrow at present as hypocritical. I look only for the remorse that waits on detection—a remorse which is very far from repentance. You are at present hardened in your sins. But I look for the consequences of your conduct—the

lifelong consequences—to break down your self-will and to awaken the stings of conscience."

Still Frank made no other reply than by again

inclining his head.

"There is another aspect of the question apart from the moral turpitude—the moral turpitude"—he repeated the ugly words—"of your case. It is the possible effect upon the Bank itself. That the son of the only proprietor of this Bank should have to go to a wretch—a wretch who charges fifty per cent.—might well cause questionings and shake credit. I have, however, bought up the note. It is now destroyed."

"A hundred pounds a year the proprietor of that great Bank allows his son." That was all that

Frank permitted himself to reply.

Sir Peter rose. He was over six feet in height; he looked twenty feet with his tall, thin figure and

long, austere face.

"I have said enough. Your crime has been discovered. You have not found a word in palliation. You have not denied the fact. I will treat you, sir, as I would treat every clerk—every person from the highest to the lowest in the employ of this Bank. Mr. Ellis, you will please direct the whole staff, except two clerks at the paying counter, to step into this office."

Frank stood facing his father; his attitude was neither that of a criminal nor of a suppliant; he was not ashamed; he was not defiant; he simply

awaited his fate.

The accountants and the clerks crowded in. Sir

Peter spoke briefly, but to the point.

"It is, or it should be understood—if Mr. Ellis, the Manager here, has done his duty, it is certainly well understood by all of you—that I will not

tolerate in my service any person whose moral character suffers from any blot of the past, or incurs any stain of the present. Those who serve me and my Bank shall be, at least, of unimpeached and unimpeachable purity and spotless reputation. If there is anyone here present who feels that he is unfit to serve under these conditions, I beg of that person to withdraw voluntarily, and at once." He paused, and there was a general shivering and trembling as of leaves stirred by the wind. They looked at each other as much as to say, "This is your business, not mine. Pray step out." But no one moved.

Sir Peter went on: "Nor will I keep in my service any person of frivolous conduct, or of levity in common discourse." Here the teeth of all the juniors began to chatter, and in the hinder ranks lads nudged each other. "Nor, again, will I allow any to remain with me who incur debts." Here those who had bought bicycles on the instalment system grew weak in the knees, and leaned against each other, and those who had not paid up their last week's lodgings turned red and hoped that Sir Peter would not ask the reason why. "Nor will I keep within my walls any who bet on horses, or go to races "-but how could they go to races?—"or play cards or gamble in any way." Here there was a fearful drawing of breath from those who were conscious of cribbage or Van John. "The very large salaries which you all receive are proportioned to your wants, each according to age and to place. I know what ought to be your standards. If you spend more, if you want more, it is a sign of extravagance. It shows that you are unfit for the responsibility of handling money." Here there was a general dropping of eyes and a

dead silence; no one ventured so much as to cough; for, alas! all were sinners alike; all had grumbled at the screw. "As, therefore, I am prepared to deal with you from the highest to the lowest, from the oldest to the youngest, from the richest to the poorest, so I must be prepared to

deal with my own son."

Here they all breathed freely. It was his son, then, not one of themselves, who had been found out. Sir Peter's son, Mr. Frank, was to be made an example of, not the clerk who had only paid five instalments of his bicycle; not the clerk who had yet to pay for his greatcoat; nor the clerk who secretly put a bit on the favourite; nor the clerk who sometimes went to a music-hall; nor the clerk who whispered funny stories which ran the round of the clerks. None of these, but Mr. Frank, the son and heir, the much-envied, and the fortunate. The colour returned to their cheeks; their knees strengthened; they stood upright. No one was going to be sacked, and if it was Mr. Frank, what would it matter to him?

Sir Peter went on, enjoying the situation as much as if he were the just and inflexible father in a tragedy, and the executioner and the block

were waiting outside.

"When I announce to you that I have discovered my son in an action which I will only describe to you as unworthy his position in the Bank; unworthy his position as my son; you will recognise that I must mete out to him the same punishment that awaits any of you who may be guilty of a similar act. My son leaves the Bank to-day; I expel him. He also leaves my house; and he is cut off from what would have been his inheritance. As a parent, I wish him repentance,

as I should wish for each and all of you under similar circumstances; repentance awakened and enforced by suffering, naturally following such a sentence. I also authorise Mr. Ellis to pay him whatever salary is due to him up to this day. You have seen, all of you, how punishment overtakes the guilty. Return to your duties."

They walked out, Frank with them. He took the money due to him; he changed his coat; he put on his hat; he nodded a cheerful farewell to

his fellow clerks; he walked away.

This was the end of his fine inheritance; this was the termination of his connection with the Bank

In the street he took out his purse and counted the money; he found that he had exactly, including his pay, just received, eleven pounds five shillings.

"And I've got a good watch and chain," he said, "and a ring or two and a tolerably good wardrobe—and that is the whole of my worldly fortune."

CHAPTER VII

AU REVOIR

THE world was all before him. Well, it was a day of warm sunshine, and the season was summer, and the world looked very pleasant. One thing had to be done before going out into the wilderness.

He took the train to Athelston. He would see Nell before he started. He found her sitting in the ruins of the Castle among the flowersher favourite retreat now that the boys were gone and the place dull.

"You here, Frank?" She started up. "Have

you got an unexpected holiday?"

"Yes, quite unexpected, and a very extensive holiday too," he replied. "A long vacation, in fact."

"What is it, Frank? Has anything happened?"

For his face was serious though he smiled.

"A good deal has happened, Nell. Let me tell you briefly. My father has turned me out of the Bank."

"Oh, Frank!"

"And out of the house—that house"—he pointed to the Elizabethan mansion—"and, I suppose, out of this Castle as well."

"Frank!"

"And out of his will. So, you see, Nell, I have now nothing."

"Frank, what does it all mean?"

"Exactly what I say. So I have run down to say good-bye, Nell."

"But not without telling me more."

"I don't want to tell you any more. Only, Nell, you have known me since I was that high. We have always been friends. Can you believe that I have done anything of which I am ashamed?"

"No, never, Frank."

"Then," his voice shook, "it is unnecessary to assure you that I have not to reproach myself with . . . with anything that need give you pain."

"No, Frank, do not say it. I cannot bear that you should think me capable of believing——"
The tears came into her eyes, and she broke down.

"And now I have caused you pain. And I

meant just to say good-bye, and to go."

"Tell me more, Frank. Reports will be spread."
"What I tell you is for your own ear only, then—mind, for no one else—no one. As for reports, I don't care so long as you do not believe them. The reason is that I had occasion—a just and laudable occasion—for a sum of money. I had to go to a money-lender, to whom I gave a promissory note—if you understand what that means. I got what I wanted. The man broke confidence, and for some reason communicated the fact to my father. He at once concluded that it was profligacy and extravagance and moral turpitude. That is what he called it. Now you understand."

"Oh, Frank! But can nothing be done? Can

you not explain to him?"

"Nothing, Nell. Without the least proof he concludes that I have been leading a life of—all that—you know. He refused to hear a word. I believe that he enjoys a good, thorough unforgiving frame of mind, and the feeling that he is a real Roman father."

"But—what will you do, Frank?"

"I don't know. I shall go abroad somewhere. I've got a pair of hands." He held them up for proof of the assertion. "I shall realise that the working man, as Ruskin says, is the perfectest person that the world can show." He laughed, as if the matter were not, after all, very serious. "I have no fear. I shall get along."

"But, Frank, you are not penniless. There is the money from your mother. You have told me of

that."

"My mother's money. I should get that in a few weeks. But, you see, I am under a cloud, and I

think, out of respect to my mother, I would rather not take her money until the cloud vanishes. What has moral turpitude to do with anything that belongs to my mother?"

"Is that just, Frank, when you have done no

wrong?"

"My father would like his sentence to be carried out in all its rigour. He shall not be pained by my demand for that money of which he is one of the trustees. He wants my conscience to be awakened by suffering. So I go out empty-handed to oblige him."

"But what will you do, Frank? Where will you

go?" she repeated.

"What can I do? I am close on one-and-twenty, I can row; so can any sailor. I can fish; I can shoot; I can play cricket and football and golf. I have learned Latin and Greek and French for fourteen years, and I know neither Latin, nor Greek, nor French. This, you see, is the advantage of being at a great public school. I can write and I can spell. I can also add up. I know no trade. I can make nothing and mend nothing. I understand no machinery. I am just a helpless Englishman of the worser sort that they call the better. And now I've got to earn my own living, and, upon my word, Nell, I don't know exactly how it is going to be done."

"And I can do nothing for you!"

" Nothing, Nell."

His face was serious for a moment. Then he smiled again. The sunshine was never long away from his face. "Oh, I have no fear—not the least fear. Somewhere in the world they must want a fellow like me, if it is only to fetch and carry. And I say, Nell"—he laughed in his old way—"if you knew what a relief it is to get out of that beast of

a Bank! Ouf! The entering and the adding up. Always figures; always the chink of the gold and the rustle of the notes. Always those poor chaps in rows, afraid to whisper or to look round. I'm out of it! And whatever happens, I go back to the Bank no longer."

" If you could have left it any other way!"

"I have come to say good-bye. Mind, I shall be back in time for that meeting—when is it?—on our joint birthday May 15, 1900, in five years time. What an old stager I shall be! In five years, Nell."

"You will have forgotten-everything by that

time."

"Shall I, though? You shall see. Mind, I shall come back. I feel certain that I shall, somehow.

I can prophesy so much."

He was loyal. He longed to take her in his arms and bind her by the memory of kisses and love's vows. But he remembered his rival. They must wait for five long years.

So he stooped, took her hand, and kissed it. "Good-bye, Nell," he whispered, "good-bye."

CHAPTER VIII

THE GRAND DISCOVERY

So Frank disappeared.

It became known in the town of Athelston through the reports that reached the local Branch, that there had been a serious rupture between Sir Peter and Frank, and it was reported that, in presence of the whole of the London staff, Frank had received his discharge from the Bank; with it

his expulsion from his father's house; and, to complete the job, the promise of a man who never swerved from the slightest promise that his name should be removed from the place as heir to the estates and property that would otherwise have come to him.

What had he done? Nobody knew. What

had become of him? Nobody knew.

Had he committed some crime? Was it only some folly? Nobody knew. Nobody had the least suspicion. Nell kept silence as to what she knew. And all that Jack could tell was that, the day before the catastrophe, Frank and he had dined together; that Frank was quite cheerful, and that nothing had been said to indicate any danger of a misunderstanding, or quarrel, or rupture between father and son. As for his own business, all he knew was that the papers and the release had come to him posted by Frank. Of the promissory note he knew nothing.

But Frank had disappeared.

It then became known, somehow, that he had not claimed, or received, the fortune to which he was entitled by his nother's will. Then people looked at each other and shook their heads. A young man sent out into the world as Frank had been, to neglect, or to forget, a lump sum of a good many thousand pounds! What could that mean?

To the world at large, when a young man is thus publicly expelled a service, and when he disappears in so mysterious a manner, there is but one interpretation commonly ascribed, and it is whispered, not spoken aloud. Frank had "done something." To "do something" is to incur penalties of the law.

That is what people meant.

The summer passed away; the autumn followed

and the winter; but still there came no news of Frank.

So passed four summers and four winters, and there came no tidings. The Society of the Gentlemen of Athelston met once a week in ancient form. For them there was little change. Still the Prime Minister remained strangely oblivious of the Archdeacon, and gave his mitres to other ecclesiastics, younger, of less dignity, and of poorer presence. No one noticed that the temples of the Gentlemen were more visible than of old; that the crown of the head was more shiny, that grey was showing through the brown, and that there were lines around the eyes. It is happy for man that advancing age creeps; it would be terrible were it to spring suddenly and clutch and claw a man, tearing off his locks, pulling out his teeth, stiffening his fingers, putting red-hot pins into his joints, and taking thought and reason and fancy out of his brain.

At these weekly meetings there was no change, save that three, at least, out of the four were always thinking of Frank, and that nobody spoke of Frank.

As for Jack, he continued at his Hospital; there were no more excursions into the world called that of Pleasure; there were no more tempations by unknown and mysterious Voices; the diggings ceased to be lonely; there were no more debts; he had had his fling and his plunge, and he had received his punishment—as he thought. But there was more to come. He passed his examinations one after the other, and with credit; for him there had been no thought of love and courtship. Like all young men who take their work seriously, his mistress was the Muse of his Profession, the

Guardian Goddess of healing. Everybody knows this peerless Nymph. Her eyes are keen and her eyebrows bent; you may find her sitting beside a bed in any of the wards; her face is full of thought; to those who court her with hard work, and give her all their heart, all their soul, and all their strength, she gives the power of reading the unseen human frame like a printed book; she gives sympathy; she gives pity; she gives knowledge; she gives wisdom. So lavish were her gifts to the young man, Jack, that no one would believe that once, for a brief space, that young man could have made himself so great an ass.

Frank had passed away. No one remembered him save those two or three old friends. The world had forgotten his existence; and even his friends now never spoke of him. But Nell waited in confidence. Frank had promised to come back. It was enough. She lived upon that promise. Once she ventured to speak about him to Sir

Peter himself.

He found her one day sitting in the ruins of the

Castle, and addressed her graciously.

"You like this lonely place?" he said. "To be sure, at this time of year it looks well." It was again the early summer, and the flowers and foliage on the walls, as on a day long gone by, made the ruins lovely.

"I come here," said the girl sadly, "because it reminds me of the time when we used to play here

-the two boys and I."

Sir Peter turned away.

"Oh!" she said, "I must speak, Sir Peter—I must speak to you about Frank."

"I cannot talk about that unhappy boy."

"I have a claim to be heard, because before he

went away he—with another—asked me to choose between them——"

"He made love to you? That boy? I am grieved indeed to hear it. This is an additional blow—an additional crime. He dared to drag you with him into the misery into which he is

plunged?"

"It was here—on this spot—that I promised to choose between them—on a certain day. Therefore I sit here and think about him, and sometimes dream that I hear his footsteps." Her eyes filled with tears.

"Poor girl! I pity you. For he is utterly unworthy. And he can never return. Did he confess to you what he had done? Did he tell you

how I treated him?"

"He told me everything—except the cause of his visit to the money-lender. But he assured me—though I never would have believed otherwise—that it was no unworthy motive."

"It was to find the money to pay for his profli-

gacy-for his vices."

"Oh, you concluded hastily! Oh, Sir Peter! you never knew your son. Because he was not like yourself, austere and hard, you fancied that he was frivolous—and worse. You never knew him. Never did Frank harbour a degrading thought; never did he commit an unworthy action!"

"Poor gir!!" But his face showed no sign of pity. "Deluded girl! He confessed to the wretch from whom he borrowed money that it was to save the honour of a house and to prevent the ruin of a young man's career. Yet you say that I was

unjust."

"What house? What young man? Then it was some act of kindness—of mercy—for which

you condemned your son. Of a surety, Sir Peter, it was not your house that he saved—nor was he the young man whom he rescued."

"Nay. . . . You know nothing. Why then did he not speak out while there was yet time? I

charged him plainly. He denied nothing."

"He was too proud to deny—or perhaps it was not his secret. Or perhaps you gave him no

opportunity."

"I put the case before my London Manager. I showed him the papers—the money-lender's statement of the interview with the young man—that is, my son. I showed him the promise to pay. asked him if there was any other interpretation to be put upon those documents except that of turpitude-turpitude-turpitude? He said that there was none. Had the money been wanted for a legitimate object he would have come to me-or he would have laid the case before Mr. Ellis. But he did not; he went secretly to a disreputable usurer. Or, if the money had been wanted for a charitable object, had I ever—ask yourself, child had I ever refused assistance for a worthy object?" Indeed, Sir Peter was the Chairman or the Patron of every Reformatory, Asylum, and Refuge within the county.

"Perhaps the object was not what you would call

worthy."

"After punishment I show mercy. Every case of penitence is worthy—every case of folly demands punishment. I forgive those who are contrite, I punish those who are guilty. As for that unhappy boy, he had his chance. He might have explained. My London Manager was present. He might have explained, had explanations been possible. He let his guilt be proved by his silence. Let me

beg you, my child, as the daughter of my old friend, one of the few men for whom I have a respect, to put the wretched boy out of your thoughts, as I have put him out of mine. For me he exists no longer. He will never return; let him be as one who is dead."

"He will return, Sir Peter; he will return. He will prove his innocence; he will heap coals of fire

upon your head!"

"Unfortunate—deluded—infatuated girl! Let me never hear another word on this subject!" And so, with voice and face and eyes set harder than ever Sir Peter turned away.

When things begin to happen after a long period of continuance in one groove, with no outward signs of change, they come together with a rush. Four years and more had passed away; there had been no change in the little town of Athelston. On market day the people stood about the stalls and bought and sold and talked in their slow way; and always the clock struck the hours, and the days passed and the churchyard grew more populous, and other children in quick succession played about the street.

"Nothing changes here," said Jack. It was close on Christmas, and he was taking a holiday from the Hospital. "I believe that I shall come down in a hundred years and find the same people

and hear the same talk."

"You must not look for change in this old town," said Nell. "It is you who change in London—you who pass examinations and get appointments in hospitals; as for us, we only grow old and presently die."

"The Archdeacon still preaches the same

sermons, and his wife still considers that he will very shortly be made a Bishop. And the Society of the Gentlemen of Athelston still meets on Wednesday evening. All is the same as it used to be—except for Frank!"

"They have forgotten Frank. Everybody ex-

cept you and me has forgotten Frank."

"I can never forget him nor the service he rendered me," said Jack. "But you, Nell, can you not forget him?" There was more meaning in his voice and in his eyes than in his words. Every woman knows the interpretation of certain tones and inflections and of a certain softening or yearning in the eyes.

"Would you like me to forget either of my old

companions? But he will come back."

"He is dead. Poor Frank! If we only knew where and how! He must be dead. Why should he keep away for so long? Had I offended him? Good Heavens! and after doing me the greatest service that ever one man did another! Yet he has never sent me a line. He must be dead."

"He is silent," she went on, "because he is too proud to protest against the charges and accusa-

tions which were made against him."

"What charges? What accusations? All we know is that he was turned out of the Bank, in the presence of the clerks, without any reason stated. There never was any man, I am certain, with a record so clear. Charges! What were the charges? He left me in high spirits the day before. And he did for me that great service of which I spoke just now. Heavens! when I look back—when I think of what might have been—what would have been—it seems as if nothing could ever pay back that service. To be sure, I would rather

not pay it back. Let me remain in his debt for ever."

"He told me nothing about any service done for

you."

"No; he would not tell anybody. It was not his way. Mind, Nell—but you do mind—Frank is the best fellow in the whole world. I will tell you. I should be ashamed to tell my father; but I can tell you, because it is Frank's secret and mine."

"Do not tell me if Frank would like it your

secret and his alone."

"Frank can do nothing that you would not like to know. You shall hear. I came out of it pretty badly. I am going to lower myself in your eyes, Nell; it is a horrid story. I tell it to you for Frank's sake."

He proceeded to relate the story of which we already know the outlines. He spared himself not at all. The girl heard him with a troubled face. Like most girls brought up in ignorance of the world, she could not possibly understand how riot and extravagance have attractions which can tempt a young man. Then came the part where he sought the assistance of the money-lender. At the mention of this name Nell became at once interested. A money-lender! It was by a man of this trade that Frank had been dragged down.

"You, too, went to a money-lender?" she

asked.

"I, too—but who was the other? I went, and I borrowed money of him—on conditions. Don't ask me how I proposed to pay the money. I went again. I got more advances. The thing went on until I was pulled up by hearing that I owed nearly £200, and that I must pay—or—application would be made to my father for nearly £200.

How could my father—you know how poor he is —find £200 in addition to the cost of my medical education?"

"Oh, I begin to understand! Oh, go on!—go

on, Jack-go on-what happened next?"

"One night we dined together, and I told Frank all. Remember what would have happened. My father would have paid that money—you know how honourable a man he is—he would have paid the money and pinched himself for life. That was nothing compared with the disgrace of the whole business, and the ruin of my work—"

"Oh, now I know!—now I know." To his astonishment Nell clapped her hands. "Now I know. You told Frank. He went himself to the

money-lender."

"Did he? How do you know that?"

"I know more. He transferred your debt to himself, and because he had no money he gave a note or promise of some sort to pay in three months—when he would have money. He told you that you were free."

"He sent me a discharge in full of all claims. But about the promissory note I know nothing. I never asked how he managed the business. It was

his secret."

"And the money-lending wretch informed Sir Peter of the debt, but not of its cause. And that was the reason, Jack, that—and no other—why Frank was sent out into the world. He had gone to a money-lender, his father said, to borrow the means of paying for his vices. Oh, Jack—Frank set you free—but at what a price! At what a price!"

"Say it again, Nell. I seem not to under-

stand."

She repeated the story.

"And Frank kept silence! And my—my folly—was the cause of all this trouble! Can I forgive myself? What can be done? What can I say or do?"

"Frank has gone away—we know not where.

Nothing can be done."

"Yes. There is something. I can tell his father the truth. Why, if the whole truth that I was so anxious to hide were to be proclaimed by the town-crier to-morrow in the Market Place, it would be nothing compared with the mischief I have done."

Nell touched his hand gently. "Be sure," she said, "that Frank does not think so. And as for me—do I not know that had you learned the truth

you would have refused to pay the price?"

This was Wednesday afternoon. Sir Peter was always at the Bank on that day. Jack went there and sent in his name. The Manager came out. His face was troubled. At the moment the young man's mind was too full of his own affairs to observe this phenomenon.

"Sir Peter is very much engaged," he said.

"Could you write your business?"

"Tell Sir Peter, please, that my business is most important, and that it concerns his son."

"Concerns his son?" repeated the Manager, "He will not have the name of his son mentioned."

"Tell him, nevertheless, if you will be so kind, that my business concerns his son."

The Manager took back the message and

returned. "Sir Peter will see you," he said.

Jack stepped into the Manager's room. Sir Peter was at the table, a pile of telegrams and papers before him. He looked up. "Concerns my son," he murmured. "You have business—that—

pray go on."

"I have come to tell you, Sir Peter, that you acted rashly towards Frank—towards your son. I have only just learned the truth. You expelled him from the Bank with ignominy; you sent him penniless into the world. I know not what has become of him. If he is dead, his death lies at your door; if he lives, his life for four years will be a reproach to you as long as you live."

"I do not know, young gentleman-"

"I am going to tell you. Frank went to this money-lender; it was not on his own account, but on mine. He went to get from the man a delay—for me. He went to save me—not himself—from the consequences of my folly—not his own. He found that the only way in which he could succeed was by taking this debt over to his own name and giving a promissory note. It was his first and his only visit to a money-lender. He had no debts; he had no vices; he had no follies. There was never a better fellow in the world that your son Frank."

"He confessed. He made no denial. It was to save a family from shame, and a young man from

ruin."

"The family was mine. I was the young man."
He laid his hand upon the table, and stooped, gazing into the face of the proud and austere man.

"I—I cannot understand. This is all news to me. Why have I never heard this before? Why did he not tell me? Why did he not come to me for the money?"

"Because you would have refused it. What! Forgive a fool, and save him from the consequences

of his folly? Never! You would have brought my mother to the grave with shame; you would have stood by while my father was crippled; you would have rejoiced to see me deprived of my profession and my career; and then, and not till then, you would have spoken of forgiveness. Go to you? Frank knew you too well!"

Sir Peter listened, without a sign of emotion. "I must think this over. Your manner is strange. You do not consider to whom you are speaking.

"Think it over, then, and say to yourself that your son was wholly free from every kind of folly; his days were spent in the Bank; his evenings were given to a lot of ragged lads. Think it over."

He went out. The Manager returned. "About these figures, then, Sir Peter?"

To his dismay the chief replied—" Never in debt at all, and he had no vices."

"These figures before us, Sir Peter. They are

very disquieting."

"Disquieting, sir? Why disquieting? Elsing's Bank, sir, is founded on the solid rock." He rose and took his hat.

Outside his carriage waited. He got in and was rolled off; sitting bolt upright; while the people looked after him, and said to each other that it must be a grand thing to be so rich and happy.

On Christmas day there was a dinner at Cromwell's House. After dinner, Jack Aylwin, with a serious countenance, begged permission to make a certain communication.

He told his father and his father's friend the whole story—his own folly, Frank's generosity,

and the penalty he paid.

Then he waited for the two elders to speak.

"The past is done with," said his father. "You have had your lesson, Jack; but Frank must be

got home again."

"There are other reasons why Frank ought to be at home," said the lawyer. "I hear sinister rumours about the Bank. Sir Peter is not what he was."

"What I told him to-day," said Jack, "isn't calculated to make him happier,"

"Where is Frank?"

"He went to Australia—I have ascertained so much. Now, sir," he addressed his father especially, "the whole trouble has been caused by me. I cannot rest for thinking of it. Let me go and find Frank, and bring him back. It is not so very big—this world."

"Go in search of him? And about this

appointment?"

"I must give it up—I must give up everything—if I can only find him and bring him back."

"Then," said the Doctor, "go, my boy; go: and if you bring him back to us we will all go on our knees before him and ask forgiveness for suspicions undeserved and thoughts unworthy! Go, Jack. If you have to ruin all your chances for life—Go!"

CHAPTER IX

SIR PETER REVOKES

THE Bank, as everybody in the financial world knew well, was going downhill. It takes time for an old-established and trusted bank to lose its credit. The country people still believed in Elsing's, and still preferred Elsing's notes to those of the Bank of England. But there were signs which might have alarmed them had they understood. Some of the smaller branches were closed; there was no pushing forward or opening of new branches; no salaries were raised, the staff was unincreased; the London Branch, greatly reduced in the number of its people, removed to less expensive premises. City people looked upon the removal with suspicion.

There was one proprietor, and only one; there were no shareholders; it was not a company. Sir Peter alone held in his hand all the strings; he alone, if anyone, knew the situation. Yet there was not a single manager of a local branch who did not tremble, looking at decreasing business; not one but recognised that Sir Peter was no longer

the man he had been.

However, the credit of the Bank was still maintained. Sir Peter was reputed to be enormously wealthy. Nobody knew, of course, how much of his property had been mortgaged and how much lost—thrown into the Bank and lost.

No one but the proprietor could understand the real position of the Bank. But Sir Peter lived in the Fool's Paradise natural to one born to great wealth and the command of an old and solid bank; he thought his resources to be inexhaustible; he thought that the Bank was suffering from a temporary check; he raised money on one security after another, and each new advance in time was swallowed up. In blind ignorance he blundered on.

Imagine the terrible moment of awakening!

The inevitable day arrived when he learned that nothing was left at all; his great property was gone, all was lost or mortgaged; nothing left

except the contents of his house.

He sat in his study; a big room furnished with solid bookcases, solid books, solid tables; the study of a man solidly rich. And he looked about him, trying to understand that his riches had taken wings and had fled. He was unable to understand how such a thing could have happened. Presently he saw as in a vision the Bank closed and the shutters up; he saw his house closed; he saw himself upon a highroad, wandering away penniless. And in his brain there rang backwards and forwards words repeated over and over again.

"You drove your son out into the world. Now go yourself." "You drove your son out into the

world. Now go yourself."

Then the words changed to words of his own, which mocked him: "Justice demands punishment. After punishment, mercy—when contrition has been shown. Punishment first—you have sentenced yourself."

So all that afternoon the rich man deprived of his riches sat in a helpless despair. He was alone in his knowledge. No one else knew of it. When would it be revealed? When would the world

learn the truth?

In moments of supreme misery and doubt the mind catches at anything as a distraction. Sir Peter remembered that the Society met that evening. When the time came he got up, composed his face and his mind to the semblance of calm, and drove to the meeting as if nothing had happened. It was not acting; it was the relief of the mind called away to think of other things

which enabled him to present that ordinary appearance. Afterwards they remembered that his face was curiously touched with grey. It is the worst sign possible when a man's face looks grey.

This evening the Archdeacon was in great importance. He had in his pocket the offer of a

Colonial Bishopric.

"This," he said, drawing a card, "may be my last evening with the Society. I have in my pocket an invitation—an offer—of the Bishopric of Tobago—Tobago—an important island in the West Indies."

"They have remembered him at last," said his wife. "I knew they would sooner or later,"

"But," said the Doctor, "is it worth your

acceptance?"

"It will be a stepping-stone," the wife explained.

"I go," said the Bishop-elect with dignity, "where duty calls me. Mine is the knave. The climate is healthy, I hear. The society is small, but as good as one can expect out of England. The—ahem!—other considerations are satisfactory. We are partners, Sir Peter. I believe that there is a distinct call to Tobago."

"Alas!" said the Doctor, "we shall have to

play dummy."

When Sir Peter had to deal, strange to relate, he made a misdeal; a thing he had never before

been known to do.

The game proceeded. The Archdeacon, or the Bishop-elect, from time to time cast an uneasy look of surprise and inquiry across the table. What was his partner doing? Generally, Sir Peter played a steady game, according to rule. To-night he seemed to observe no rule. He played like a schoolgirl. He paid no attention. His partner

observed that the game was simply being thrown away. But he restrained himself. Sir Peter would pull himself together.

"Three by tricks," said one of the adversaries,

scoring.

"Two by honours," said the Archdeacon. "Sir Peter, you did not return my lead."

"Return your lead? What was your lead?"

"I led trumps. That was all"—in a hollow voice. "A return of trumps would have given us the game. But never mind. The best players sometimes make a mistake. I fear that as a Bishop I must not play whist. However—"

The game went on. And then a terrible thing

happened. Sir Peter made a revoke.

The adversary turned a trick and proved the fact.

"It is too true," groaned the Archdeacon. "Sir Peter, you have actually made a Revoke! Wonderful! How long is it since such a thing has happened to any of us? Twenty years? Surely, quite twenty years. If we were superstitious, we might accept the revoke as an omen of disaster."

The Doctor looked at Sir Peter curiously. He saw a strange thing, for the austerity all went out of that hard, cold face. It became another face; the features were the same, but the expression changed; the mind of the man had undergone some sudden alteration; it was now a soft, even a yielding face; the mouth relaxed into a smile; the eyes became gentle and pitiful, like the eyes of a girl. The other players observed this change. They sat with their cards on the table before them, in a kind of stupefaction. What did this mean?

Then Sir Peter laid his hands upon the table, and stood up, rising with apparent difficulty—

"Gentlemen of the Society," he began, but his voice was thick; he spoke as if feeling for words, and his breathing was heavy. "This is the last occasion, I believe, on which I shall have the honour — the honour, I say . . . of . . . of . . . " He stopped and began another sentence. "I hope that, as I was just saying before I was interrupted . . . that the venerable Society may continue the punch and . . ." Here he wandered again. Coming back gradually to coherence, "I did not intend to mention the thing to-night. In a day or two - or a month, perhaps - you will all know. But since I am here, and we are all friends, and since it is just as well that you should know as soon as possible, I may tell you that he had no debts, and that he had no vices, and that the money was not for himself at all. There was another matter that I wished to tell you . . ." Here, again, he wandered.

By this time the other players were standing up, and the ladies, wondering what this phenomenon

meant, were gathered at the table as well.

"I am glad," he went on, "that I have told you"—but he had told nothing. "You will, of course, understand that I have suffered greatly. It was not until this afternoon, when your son, Doctor, called, that I understood the truth. The telegrams of to-day make it certain that my son had no vices—and—if there are no more securities available—justice will demand punishment first and mercy afterwards—with contrition—with contrition. I shall probably go into a Reformatory. You will all be there to see."

He stopped; he put his hand to his forehead as

if trying to remember something. Then he reeled, and would have fallen, but the Doctor caught him and laid him gently on the floor.

They carried him to bed and left him with the Doctor. Then they gathered round the fire and

talked in whispers.

The supper that night was a funereal feast, and

there was no bowl of punch.

"Archdeacon," said the Doctor, "or my Lord Bishop, if it is not premature—"

"Not, I fear, until consecration."

"-I am very much afraid that next winter the

Society will have to play double dummy."

And lo! when the morning came and the sick man opened his eyes, wit and memory, and austerity and philanthropy, and all were gone, and Sir Peter was out in the world, not only deprived of his treasure hoards, but also deprived of his wits. Henceforth he would be as a child—a gentle, docile child, never to grow up.

CHAPTER X

FORTUNE'S DEBT

To look for a man in the wide world, where there are so many men, seems a wild-goose chase. It is not, however, either a hopeless or an impossible task, always provided that your man has actually gone out into the world. I mean that perhaps he has stayed at home. In that case the difficulties would be multiplied tenfold. Suppose, for instance, that, being a resident in Clubland he should go away, say, to Spitalfields or Clerkenwell.

Who would find a man in Clerkenwell? If a man was not wanted by the police and had "done" nothing, he might live a long life through with very little fear of discovery. All he would have to do would be to change his name, adopt a calling of some kind in order to avoid suspicion, and perhaps "make up" a little. I once wrote the history of a man who desired for certain reasons that his friends should think he had been drowned. He, therefore, after laying his plans so as to induce this belief, conveyed himself to a side street in Stepney, where he took a ground-floor lodging, changed his name, assumed spectacles, grew his beard, and put an announcement in the window that book-keeping, arithmetic, and writing were taught by the occupant. This man was absolutely safe.

In the case of Frank Elsing the thing was much more simple. He did not, to begin with, change his name; nor was he anxious to conceal himself; his story might have been told to anybody, pasted on the wall, or made into a sky-sign, for all the harm it would do him. He was, further, a young man, of striking appearance, tall and comely, frank of manner, and of a cheerful countenance. Further, it had been ascertained that he had gone out as a steerage passenger in an Australian liner bound for Melbourne. These points, you see, were very

much in favour of success.

Then, again, if you ask yourself what such a man would do on arriving at his port, you will find that at first he will take what he can get in the town. He will try to find employment at the special kind of work that he can do. Here was the main difficulty. A carpenter or a cabinet-maker would go to masters in his trade. Frank had no trade.

What could he do? What did he know? He

answered the questions himself. He had been at a public school; he had learned during nine years a very little Latin and less Greek; a very little history; a very little French; a very little mathematics. All these contributions or doles of knowledge had been forgotten. He could ride; he could shoot; he could play various games, such as cricket, football, golf, as an amateur and a gentleman. But these accomplishments would not advance him much in a colony. Then, again, he had been for two years a junior in a bank; he wrote a fairly good hand; he possessed general intelligence. He might become a clerk on the strength of the latter qualifications. He was not tempted, because there are already more clerks than places for them to fill, and all those appointments which are worth having are already filled by Australians, Moreover, he would not begin again to sit at a desk. Clerking attracted him not.

We are still at the stage of civilisation where it seems to the multitude a finer thing to drive the quill than to work the plane and the saw. I think that we are nearing the end of this stage; the heresy of the black coat is almost ready to disappear; the old pride in the craft, in the leather apron and the shirt-sleeves, is ready to come back. It was to a craft that Frank would have joined

himself. But, alas! he knew no craft.

Another refuge for the destitute is the newspaper office. There are many pickings on a newspaper. As a gatherer of events, if one is sharp, active, and observant—if one can write paragraphs at street corners on flimsy, or descriptive articles full of life at the bar of a saloon—then the lower walks of journalism may offer an exciting livelihood, if a precarious one.

Frank, however, had no yearning for the profession of letters in any branch, and was not tempted by the charms of the pen and the six-

penny "par."

Formerly, when a young man wanted work and could get no other, he went about among the private schools looking for a place as Usher. This resource no longer offers itself to struggling talent. The Board School has shut up the old private schools of the lower middle class. Incompetence must look elsewhere.

Some young men, again, look to find on the stage an opening for undeveloped talent. The stage is to the young adventurer what the private school used to be. He is taken on if he is lucky; he quickly proves that he cannot act; he learns in a few weeks all he can ever learn of the art of acting; and he remains a starving hanger-on of the theatre for the rest of his life. This young man at least was not tempted to try the stage.

He began, then, with an equipment of knowledge and accomplishments very slenderly adapted for the service of the world. He was obliged to take whatever Fortune offered; and as, in a land where only crafts are wanted, he knew no craft, he was compelled to accept the meanest and the lowest jobs. Fortune was favourable. She gave him various posts; a place on the railway connected with the goods department, where he dodged Death the Destroyer all day long among the trucks. She saved his life and promoted him to be a packer, a messenger, a light porter, a night watchman, a hall-porter in a hotel, a gardener's assistant, a plumber's handy man. One might fill a volume with this pilgrim's experiences; they could hardly have been vicissitudes, because he was always down below among the men of the broad back and the horny hand; but no one can deny that they were experiences.

It was four years since his exile; he had been all that time a working man of the humbler kind; he had never put on the dress of a gentleman; nor had he spoken to a gentlewoman; nor had he entered a house or sat at a table where there was culture or refinement. His life, which had strengthened his limbs and given breadth to his shoulders and depth to his chest, insomuch that he was now a son of Anak to look upon, had not made his conversation or his thoughts coarse or common. Nor was he one whit saddened. He should go back to England to keep that appointment; somehow or other, he knew not how, Fortune owed him so much after kicking him about like a football for years, and would cerainly pay that debt. On that point he entertained no doubt whatever.

On May 15, in the year 1900, he was to be in the ruins of the Norman Castle to meet the girl he loved. Yet he was up-country and shepherding. It is an occupation which is at once healthy, responsible, and belonging to the open air. So far it is desirable. There are other points about it, however, which are less advantageous. It is not a service with prizes or promotions; it leads to nothing; if a man stays too long shepherding he is fit for nothing else, and can become nothing else; he belongs to the Australian upland. When they live three or four together in a hut there is company; the talk of it is monotonous; the ways of it soon satiate the sharers in it; the food is monotonous; the work is monotonous. There are no

books for them; there are no newspapers; there is no post. The whole world is as silent as the nether world, the world of the dead; they hear nothing of the windy ways of men; some of them forget the world altogether. In such a life, which Mark Tapley should have tried, there is some credit in being jolly.

There was a day late last year when Frank came home, weary with the heat and the work of the day, to the hut which he shared with three others in the same plight as himself. To his exceeding great joy a newspaper, not more than a week old,

had found its way to the station.

"The war's begun, old man," shouted one.

"Won't we give them a licking, just?"

"My son," said another, a greybeard, "don't cry out before you've done it. I know the Transvaal. They mean to fight."

"And they've accepted Colonials! And they're

recruiting down in Sydney."

"Let's have supper," said Frank.

After supper he took up the paper and read it in silence. "You fellows," he said, "what did I tell you? Something, I said, would take us out of this before long. Why, it only wants six months to the time when I've got to show up in England. I knew something would happen!"

He put on his hat and coat. "Who'll come with me? I'm off to Sydney. I'm going to

volunteer."

There were four men in that hut. Two of them joined him; the three tramped off to the nearest railway station; and so got on to Sydney. In two days' time Frank had changed his rough shepherding clothes for a neat uniform of light brown; and he was carrying a rifle; and he was drilling with

zeal, and, with the rest of the New South Wales contingent, he was eager for the ship to sail that would take them to the place where the fighting was

going on.

At this very time his old friend, in pursuit of him, landed at Melbourne. He inquired of the police; they knew nothing; had never heard the name of Elsing. Had the man been a sharper or a "sportsman," they would have known all about him; had he been a bookie, they would have known where to find him. Virtue too often has to remain in obscurity, you see; it is the price men pay for being virtuous; the police have nothing to do with the virtuous. Then Jack put an advertisement in the papers. He offered a reward for the present address of one named Francis Peter Elsing, who had landed in Melbourne in September 1895. No one could give him that address. But he got a start in his search, because a dozen and more were able and willing to give him information as to the various employments of his man, who made friends with everybody with whom he worked. By means of this information he traced this casual and uncertain career from one situation to another; from one town to another. The last place in which he landed, his man was a night watchman in a warehouse at Sydney. Here he broke down. Frank had held the post for a short time only. He left it of his own accord, saying that he didn't mind work, but he objected to walking about alone in an empty house all night, and that they had better advertise for a recluse or for one who hated his fellow-men.

What was to be done next? He tried another advertisement; a dozen more; there was no reply. Frank seemed to have vanished.

One day, by chance, he got his clue. He was standing in a crowd, looking on, when a small company of mounted volunteers rode through the streets amid the cheers of the people. Why, such a chance was just what Frank would have desired above all things. He went to the recruiting-office. Among the list he saw the name he wanted. But those men had already sailed.

A month later Jack himself landed at Durban, and went up to the front with an ambulance

waggon.

The shot and shell flew fast and furious over the beleaguered town; there was fighting in the trenches, and fighting on kopje, fighting in the open, and under cover. But neither shot splinter struck one of the New South Wales contingent besieged in that place. The provisions ran short; the fare grew rougher every day; and fever and dysentery fell upon the garrison, and it was worse than the enemy. Yet as the weeks went on, while the men around him sank and died or were struck down and died, neither fever nor dysentery harmed this man. The joy of war filled his soul; the old instinct of his race was awakened in him as in thousands of others; as in the weather-worn lad beside him, who had been a slouching lout in the London streets and was now a soldier full of fight. At home the folk snatched at the papers, which told of success and defeat: they were elated with the one; they were shamed and humiliated by the The men in the field who did the fighting were satisfied if they believed in their leaders.

It was enough for them to do the fighting. The joy of battle! War is a dreadful thing, but more dreadful to those looking from a distance than to

those who are in it. There may be a time when the instinct of fighting will be turned into a nobler channel; but I doubt it: we must not expect to change the nature of the man altogether; after many thousands of years, perhaps. When a certain war correspondent stood on the field of Omdurman four years ago he was fain to cry out aloud that this was the happiest day in all his life. To the man who fights, every day may be the happiest day in all his life.

Frank was in the besieged city. Outside, beaten back by the hills and rocks, and daily pressing on again, our men advanced to the rescue. Daily, those within the beleaguered place heard the roar of cannon, and said: "Surely to-morrow will bring relief!" But the morrow came, and many morrows,

but there was no relief.

Yet it came at last. And on the very last day of the fighting, when the relief was well-nigh within the lines, the last man who fell was Trooper Elsing. His company retired and left him lying on his back, motionless and with closed eyes and white face. They left him there for dead.

Among those who rode in first was Jack Aylwin.

Where were the Colonials?

They were easily found; they were shouting welcome to the relieving force. He joined them; he asked after his man—Elsing. Where was Elsing? He was missing.

He was dead; killed yesterday. Not yet

buried; lying out on the veldt.

Jack stood among the joyous crowd sick at heart. So it was all in vain! Killed, and only yesterday! Where was it? Two of his comrades, seeing his grief, offered to show him the place, and took him to the trenches outside. There lay dead

Boers and dead Englishmen, dead Irishmen and dead Colonials. Presently he saw, lying apart from the rest, the man whom he had come to recall.

He knelt beside him. He felt his heart; it was beating still; life was still in him—a faint spark—but still—life. "Good Heavens!" he cried. "The man's alive! Frank! Frank! Open your eyes! Open your eyes! Look up. You are not dead. Don't you know me?"

But Frank made no answer.

They carried him tenderly to the hospital; and to the nurses it seemed as if a bed was wasted on

a man who was already dead.

"Old man," said Frank, a few days later, "what is the day and what is the month? Oh! Very good. Remember. We're due at the Castle on May 15. You must tinker me up in time. I shall do. Don't be afraid. Why, Nell expects us."

CHAPTER XI

FORTUNE PAYS HER DEBTS

You think, of course, that you know what followed. Nelly waited for her lovers in the old keep. The swallows and the swifts flew about the walls; the church clock struck the three-quarters; fifteen minutes only to the hour; would they, after five years, keep that appointment? Would either of them forget that appointment? If so, which? Would Frank get home for that appointment? You picture the anxiety and the doubt of the maiden until the striking of the clock, when lo!—the two young men appear—

and the judgment is pronounced and sentence declared.

You are quite wrong. Circumstances occurred which interfered with that appointment and entirely destroyed the dramatic effect. The domestic drama is, in fact, a thing very difficult to arrange, and the most careful scenario is always liable to go wrong and to be deprived of its finest situations. For in landing at Southampton-it was on May 14, the day before the appointment -Jack Aylwin telegraphed to his father that he had found, and brought home, the wanderer. It was a kindly thing to do, but, if you consider, it destroyed the doubt and uncertainty which should have formed part of the situation. The Doctor took the telegram to the lawyer, and the lawyer called his daughter. "They have found him, Nell," he cried, "and he's come home. He will be here to-morrow. Jack has been successful." Of course, he did not observe the "mantling blush," and turned to the Doctor. "Quite time, too. We are sitting on the safety-valve. Quite time." He considered the position a moment, and then looked at the telegram again. "Why can they not come on to-day? If they only knew! Let us go up to town and meet them at Waterloo."

There were, indeed, many reasons why Frank's

return was ardently desired.

If you consider, the conduct of a bank whose proprietor is not only wrecked in fortune, but also in health, is a thing of considerable difficulty and danger. The situation was discovered by the lawyer, when he had to look into Sir Peter's affairs, and found, to his amazement, that the whole of his great property was gone—thrown into the Bank—and lost. It was irretrievably lost.

Yet the Bank went on. In financial circles its former credit was gone; yet it went on. Loss of credit in London takes time to filter down into the bucolic mind. The Bank went on. Yet at any moment there might be something to destroy confidence, and if there were an alarm and a run the result would be disastrous.

If Frank would only return! The youth, his cheerful face, his pleasant manners, would maintain confidence; and what was more important still, he had it in his power to restore to the Bank something of its old solid foundation of capital.

You have heard how, at the time of disgrace and exile, he refused to wait for, and to receive, the fortune left him by his mother; and how he

spoke of it as a "few thousands."

Those of us who are not born in the purple of King Plutus speak, and think, even of a "few thousands" with respect—some of us, with awe. This young man, however, was born and brought up in the world where thousands, to inspire respect, must be many, not few. I do not suppose that he ever asked the amount for which his father and Mr. Emanuel Osbert were joint trustees; he was beyond the consideration of a "few" thousands; he saw himself the sole heir to wealth which appeared inexhaustible. And I believe that, after five years of life in the depths and the low-levels, he had forgotten the existence of that fortune, or believed vaguely that, like the solid bulk of the family wealth, it was all in the hands of his father.

Now the few thousands were a very solid lump indeed; his mother's portion was £20,000; for five-and-twenty years this money had been administered by an able and honest trustee, Mr. Emanuel Osbert. If you sit down and calculate what that sum may

come to in five-and-twenty years at four per cent. and compound interest, you will find that it amounts to more than double that sum. In short, the "few" thousands were originally twenty and were now over forty.

Therefore, when the train arrived at Waterloo the wanderer and exile was met by Mr. Osbert

'and Dr. Aylwin.

There was a good deal to explain after the handshaking; Frank only had the left hand to do it with, the right being still in a sling. There was a very serious consultation, in consequence of which an adjournment took place to a certain city bank, where business of great importance was hurriedly transacted. It was business of such very great importance that the little arrangement by which the two rivals were to present themselves at the moment appointed, and not till then, was knocked on the head. They both went tamely down to Athelston that same day.

Frank was back again. It was the day before the tryst. He stood before his beloved. His arm, as I have said, was still in a sling; but there were no other signs of the shot-wounds which had riddled him. A tall and comely youth, when he went away, a big and handsome man when he came back. And with the light in his eyes which made the girl drop her own eyes, and set her heart a-beating and her cheek aflame. He had not, then, forgotten. As for the other—well—somehow, she

was not thinking of the other.

"I've come a day too soon, Nell," said Frank.
"But there are reasons. I thought to find my father as I left him. And now he is—as you know."

"So long as you have come back," she stammered.

"Jack saved my life," he said gravely. "Please remember that. There is nothing—nothing—even——" But he checked himself. "Nothing that would be too great a sacrifice in return."

"Frank saved my honour," said Jack with equal solemnity. "I owe him more than I could ever

repay."

"To-morrow, Frank," said Mr. Osbert, "you must go into the market and receive the congratulations of the people. Come, now, to see

your father."

Sir Peter lived in a corner of the great house. Servants and footmen, carriages and coachman—all were gone. It was understood that he could not leave his room. It was not understood that he could no longer keep up his old establishment. He sat in a chair all day beside the fire, or in the sunshine of the window, and he talked wandering nonsense to his nurse.

At the sight of his son his face lit up with a gleam of memory, but only for a moment. He murmured something about debt and vices, and turned away. His mind and his memory were both gone. A soft and gentle childhood lay upon his face.

Frank spoke to him. It was useless. The explanations, the retractations, the regret which he had looked for would never be spoken.

"Henceforth, Frank, you are yourself the Head of the House. Your cares begin to-morrow."

The busiest day of the week—the only busy day—of the little town is market day. On that day the farmers drive in with their samples for the

Corn Exchange; on that day the hucksters set up their stalls in the Market Place. There are the butchers' stalls; the poultry stalls; the drapery and mercery stalls; the gingerbread and cake stalls; the cheese and butter stalls; the fruit stalls; the herbalist's stall, where you can buy a medicine for any disease under the sun; and there, crowding the place, are the countryfolk and the townfolk, happy in the weekly excitement of animation and loud talk.

Market day is also the one busy day at the Bank. All day long there is paying-in; all day long there is paying-out. Market day is also the one busy day for the old-fashioned inn next to the Bank, whose steps and hall are crowded all the morning, whose commercial room is filled with travellers, and whose two-o'clock ordinary is "used" by the most substantial farmers of the country.

The Bank opens its doors at ten.

Now, on this morning, when the shopkeepers opened their places, they stood at their doors, or they ran from door to door with some unwelcome news. And when the farmers drove in and put up their spring-carts in the courtyards of the inns, they were greeted with whispers, murmurs, or open talk. What started these reports? No one knows; the news had come down from London, perhaps. A sense of uneasiness had been slowly growing, perhaps, and now came to a head. No one knows; and no one, after the event, took the trouble to inquire. The ugly rumour ran that Elsing's Bank had failed.

It had not failed; but there is no smoke without fire: it was in such imminent danger that had the panic broken out a week before in any of the

branches the Bank must have come down.

The news spread; all over the Market Place the people, in groups, told each other what had happened. No one asked for proof; no one asked if it was true. Elsing's Bank had failed.

By half-past nine the Market Place was crowded, but there was neither buying nor selling. The Corn Exchange was empty; outside the inn the

farmers stood with agitated faces.

A quarter to ten; the doors would open in fifteen minutes. The crowd pressed down on that side of the Place; the voices grew louder; the strongest pushed their way to the front; they banged the doors with their sticks; they shouted, "Open! Open!" And from those behind them there arose a roar which had in it more of terror than of pity.

"Broke? Can they pay in cash? When shall we know? What shall we do?"

All their money was in the Bank; all the money of the farmers; all the money of the shopkeepers; the current accounts of all the country round were kept at this branch. And they said that the Bank was "broke"!

The doors were thrown open, the crowd surged in, shouting "Money! Money! We want our

money!"

The Manager stood behind the counter, He knew that Mr. Frank had come back; he knew the arrangement which had been effected - he wanted time.

"The run has come," said the lawyer. "Thank Heaven you have come in time, Frank! Now, go and face the people. Make them a speech. A telegram will bring a messenger down from London in an hour and a half. Your security was not long in being wanted. Don't be afraid. You will stop the run, and the Bank will be stronger than ever."

"Money!" said the Manager. "Of course you shall have your money. When did Elsing's fail to give you your money?"

"You've got fifty pounds of mine," said a burly farmer. "I want that back. Give me my fifty

pounds,"

"I want seventy pounds." "I want twenty pounds." They fought with each other to get to the counter.

The two clerks stood at the back, pale and trembling. The Manager remained undaunted, leaning forward on his hands on the counter.

"You fools!" he said, "you great fools! Do you suppose that I am going to hand you money across the counter because you are bawling for it? Get out, all of you, and draw your cheques in order, and bring them back."

"Give me pen and ink, then," cried the man who wanted his fifty pounds, brandishing a cheque-book.

"No, I won't. Get out, and draw your cheques somewhere else. You are not going to bully me. Draw out every penny of your balance. Get out, I say, and come back with your cheques."

They looked at each other; the position of the Manager was unassailable; they retired, loudly threatening. They were succeeded by another lot, who were also met with the same treatment.

"I want all my money," said one. "Tell me

how much it is."

"Put your pass-book in the place provided," said the Manager. "It shall be made up to-day, and you shall have the book to-morrow morning, when you can draw your balance."

The first attack on the Bank was met. But

they were all drawing cheques. In every shop they were hastily drawing cheques. They came back with these cheques. "Go slow—go slow," said the Manager. "Count everything twice over.

Give me each cheque to look at."

He took one. "You want to draw your whole balance?" he asked. "Then draw it for the right amount? You don't know what it is? Then get your pass-book and find out. Fifty pounds? Certainly." He handed the cheque to his clerk. "How will you have it? Now for you. What's this? Account overdrawn." And so on, slowly examining every cheque, while the clerks, with exasperating carefulness, slowly counted the gold, and entered the number of the notes.

"Now is your turn, Frank."

Most of the people had forgotten the lad who had grown up among them. Nobody recognised in the big man in the stained khaki costume, with his arm in a sling, the son of Sir Peter Elsing. Mr. Osbert came with him, and the Doctor. The town-crier also accompanied him. This functionary, who wears a blue frock-coat with brass buttons, and a cocked hat with gold lace, worn after the manner of the great Napoleon, carried a bell, which might have been borrowed from the church tower, so big and sonorous it was.

Mr. Osbert mounted the steps of the Market Cross. The town-crier rang his bell with zeal. Then he shouted: "Oyez! Oyez!" and

the people turned.

"While you are waiting to get your cheques cashed," cried Mr. Osbert, "you may listen to Mr. Frank Elsing, who came back from South Africa yesterday. He has been wounded, as you may see. You must not press upon him."

Then Frank took his place upon the steps, and silence fell upon the people, and at the sight of the uniform and the wounded arm and the thought of the war, they forgot for the moment even the panic

and the dreadful fear of losing their money.

"Friends all," said Frank. "It is five years since I went away. And to come back and find a run upon the old Bank is the last thing that I expected. What? After all these years do you think that Elsing's Bank—my people's Bank—is going to fail you? Not a bit of it. Send in your cheques, all of you. As fast as the clerks can manage it they will pay you across the counter. It looks as if there's going to be a busy day for them doing it! Well, you will be pleased to hear that as there may not be enough money in the Bank to meet all your cheques at the moment, a messenger is on his way from London with a sackful of gold. He will arrive about twelve. It is now nearly half-past ten. I would advise you not to crowd the counter over there, because you only get in each other's way."

The crowd wavered. One voice cried, "Give us our money!" But no one followed. Then a

farmer stood forward.

"Mr. Frank," he said, "I remember you very well. And I'm glad to see you back again. You look as if you mean what you say. Tell us again.

Is our money safe?"

"Upon my honour," said Frank, "your money is safe. Upon my honour, a messenger is on his way with a bagful of gold. There is plenty in the Bank for ordinary business, but not enough for a panic. Sit down in peace and do your own business till that messenger arrives."

Then Mr. Osbert spoke.

"You all know me," he said. "What Mr. Frank Elsing has told you is true. All of you will be paid—to-day, if you desire it, and in full. My own balance is over £500—I leave it there."

The better sort began to fall back. There was still a crowd of those whose balances were small; they pressed and clamoured and squeezed into the outer office, and bawled at the counter; there was

plenty of money for them.

Frank went on. "You trusted my father and his father before him. He is now, I grieve to find, unable to meet you. Perhaps you will be able to trust me as well as him. For, in future,

I am to be the Director of the Bank."

He stayed there all the morning. He walked about the Market Place; he advised women who stood pale and trembling on the skirts of the crowd and reassured them; he found old friends; he went into the inn and shook hands with the landlady, engaging a place for the ordinary; and he presented a face so cheerful and so inspiring that long before the messenger from London arrived the great pressure was over; the principal customers were reassured; and the people who had got their money were hanging about half ashamed of themselves. At half-past twelve the messenger arrived with a large leather bag strapped with steel to his wrist. He drove from the station with no appearance of haste, and made his way through the people within.

Frank stood on the doorsteps and called out, "Now you can all come up. I am very much

obliged to you for waiting."

No one obeyed. The run had been stopped. The Bank was safe.

"Is it only safe for the moment?"

"Now you've come back it is safe altogether. Of late years I fear your father's judgment was not what it had been. You came in time."

And now you understand why that dramatic scene arranged so long before never came off. Frank dined with the farmers; with him sat the Manager, rejoicing inwardly and outwardly calm and superior. The company were subdued and ashamed; the new Director, however, was affable and forgiving; he talked as if a run upon the Bank was quite a natural and even a common occurrence.

Next day there was a paragraph in the London

papers.

Yesterday the country town of Athelston in Essex presented a scene of the wildest excitement. A rumour was spread abroad early in the morning that Elsing's Bank—the local branch of which is the only Bank in the town—had failed. It was market day; the town was full; and the panic that followed will not readily be forgotten. Sir Peter Elsing, the Director, is confined to the house, but fortunately his son, Mr. Francis Elsing, who has just returned invalided from South Africa, was able to stay the panic, and to persuade the people to draw out their money in order and quietly. All who presented cheques received payment. The larger depositors abstained from the run, and in the afternoon confidence was so far restored that almost all who had withdrawn their money brought it back to the Bank.

It was not till five in the afternoon that Frank presented himself—not in the ruins of the Castle, but in the dark panelled old room that they called Oliver Cromwell's Library.

"I have missed my appointment, Nell," he said.

"Am I too late?"

"Jack has been here," she replied, with hanging head.

"And you told him?"

"I told him — oh, Frank, must I repeat what I told him?"

Nay. There was no need. If explanations were wanted, they might come after.

"We shall now," said the Doctor, later on that evening, "carry on the Society of the Gentlemen of Athelston. The new Vicar plays whist. We shall not have to fall back, as I feared, on double,

or even single dummy."

"I've had a splendid time," said Frank. "Five years' adventures to remember." He sighed. "And now I've got to settle down at the Bank, where I began, to a hum—" Nelly looked up with a reproachful smile. "No, Nell, not a humdrum life at all."

THE LUCK OF THE SUSAN BELL

CHAPTER I

THE SAILING OF THE SUSAN BELL

THE quay of Nantucket Port was crowded.

Not with a noisy throng: the better sort of Nantucket Island were there; the shipbuilders, the merchants, the retired captains, the part proprietors and the shareholders of the whaling fleet. Their dignity forbade noise. They stood together with their wives and daughters, conversing gravely-in the year 1790 there was not on this island, whatever you might find in frivolous Boston, much idle discourse or crackling laughter, even among the young, partly on account of the deplorable uncertainty as regards the next world, partly on account of the unreliable habits of the Right Arctic Whale, who cannot be depended upon to go where he is sure to be harpooned. The Susan Bell was now ready for her voyage; she would weigh anchor immediately, and she was bound for Baffin's Bay, the last of the whaling fleet which that year set sail from Nantucket Island. A new ship, only three years old; but she had already the reputation of being a lucky

ship.

As for the ship's company, they were all, without exception, Nantucket men, young fellows, lusty, and in good heart; they leaned over the bulwarks and exchanged last greetings with their friends on the quay; now and then one lifted up his voice and sang a verse of a sea-song; and in the fo'c's'le was a fiddler ready to cheer up those, if any, who were in the dumps.

The better class stood, I have said, apart; all round the quay were the friends of the sailors. They were the fishermen, boat-builders, ropemakers, block-makers, sail-makers, mast-makers, and all the "makers" who belong to a seaport. They sat on the cranes, they sat on trucks and drays, they leaned against posts, and they discussed

the ship, the skipper, and the crew.

As for the ship, they were wrapt in admiration of her. The Susan Bell was a craft of 350 tons, round in the bows, strengthened doubly and trebly against the grip of a Greenland floe, rigged for safety rather than for speed, with squat thick masts and heavy yards; her bulwarks, like her bows, strong as timber could make them. "A lucky ship," said these honest fellows, with whom a character for luck is worth all the sailing qualities ever invented.

When they had considered the vessel, they fell to praising her company, which, they said, surpassed all other companies that ever went afloat in all seamanlike qualities—but this was to be expected of Nantucket men. Finally, they spoke in high praise of the skipper, William Stephen, than whom a finer young fellow never put hand to harpoon. This was his first voyage as skipper;

he, too, like his ship, was surely born to luck as the

sparks fly upwards.

On board the ship, in the captain's cabin, was gathered a little company. First there was Captain Gamaliel Waite, once himself skipper, now owner, in the whaling trade: a portly man, with authority, as well as success, written on his face. He wore a blue coat, with brass buttons; his hair was powdered; he had white silk stockings; there were gold buckles on his shoes; he carried a hat red with gold lace, and a gold-headed stick. With him stood his daughter, Mehetabel, the greatest beauty, as well as the greatest heiress, of Nantucket. She was dressed in silk, and wore silk gloves; she wore also a hat with a cascade of ribbons behind it, and round her neck, floating airily, was an ethereal cloud of lace. Her figure was tall, her face was handsome, though the features were too pronounced; a proud and self-reliant girl she seemed, and perhaps obstinate. The Rev. Dr. Eliezur Horder and Mr. Bullivant, the Pothecary, made up the party. A bottle was on the table with glasses,—a bottle of Captain Waite's own Madeira, -and they were drinking luck to the good ship on her voyage.

"Young man,"—the owner addressed Captain Stephen, and his manner was pompous,—"I am about to drink luck to the Susan Bell. You are full young to command a ship, but I have had my eyes upon you—my eyes, mind. If I don't know a good sailor, who should? Answer me that!" No one answered him, but Mr. Bullivant raised his glass to the light and rolled it about as if admiring the viscosity and the richness and the golden colour of it. "I say, young man, that I have confidence in you. And I mean to prove it.

Eh? I can understand other things besides seamanship. Eh? Young men will have their eyes on the girls. Eh? Why not? Therefore—I say this in the presence of my esteemed friends, Dr. Eliezur Horder and Pothecary Bullivant—when you bring this ship back to port with a cargo—'tis a lucky ship—you will find waiting for you a wife"—here Mehetabel blushed and dropped her eyes—"why shouldn't I say it? The best-looking girl in all Nantucket—Eh, Mehetabel?—and because I grow old and want the support of a younger man—with a wife—a partnership in my—Eh?—my extensive affairs. What do you say, girl?"

"Surely, father," she murmured modestly,

"Captain Stephen can speak for himself."

The young skipper was a good-looking, well-built young fellow—clear of eye, as becomes a sailor, square of shoulder and hard of mouth, as becomes a skipper who may at any moment have to knock down one man and clap another in irons. He wore his brown hair long and tied behind without powder, and, like Captain Waite, he had a blue coat with brass buttons. He received this communication in a surprising manner: that is, he showed no external symptoms of joy; he appeared embarrassed; he changed colour; he dropped his eyes; and he turned his face so as to avoid looking upon his promised bride.

"Hands upon it, Captain Stephen. Mehetabel, your hand. Now, friends, drink about! Here's luck to the Susan Bell, and a happy return to my

son-in-law that is to be-Will Stephen!"

So they all drank. But the young captain, taken aback, probably, by this unexpected good fortune, hung his head and looked at his wits' end for words—no doubt he was seeking for words of gratitude.

The verbal expression of gratitude is, we know, as difficult as the emotion itself is rare.

"What, Mehetabel?" cried her father; "you do not drink the toast. Come, girl, say the words with a will, and toss off the glass, and make the

poor chap happy."

"Captain Stephen," cried Mehetabel, boldly lifting her glass, "success to the Susan Bell. And," she whispered, glancing at his averted face, "a speedy and a happy return." So she drank off the whole glass, and replaced it on the table. But the young captain, recipient of so many gifts and good wishes, still hung his head, and looked, as one may say, little better than a fool.

"And now, friends," said the owner, "we must get over the side, unless we would be carried into Baffin's Bay, and spend the winter, perhaps, on the

coast of Labrador."

There stood apart on the quay, as belonging neither to the richer class nor to the craftsmen, a girl of eighteen or nineteen. She was accompanied by an old negress, who crouched on the ground at her feet. The girl stood quite still; she kept her eyes fixed upon the ship with a wistful, longing look. She was dressed simply, with a russet frock, a bright ribbon about her neck, a straw hat, and cotton gloves, white, but not so white as the arms they left uncovered between the wrist and the sleeve. On her third finger beneath her glove a ring was visible, and this ring the girl kept feeling, as if to make sure that it was still there. When she looked round she showed a face of great sweetness, with soft hazel eyes and light brown hairnot feathery, but lying in a solid mass upon her head.

"Nurse," she whispered, "they are running

about; there is the bo's'n's whistle; they are going to weigh the anchor. Shall I see him before she sails? Captain Waite is getting over the side."

"Sho', child. He'll be on de quarter-deck, great

and grand."

Then to the shrill whistle of the bo's'n's pipe and the "Yeo-heave-oh!" of the men, the anchor was weighed. They ran out upon the yards and shook out the sails, and the ship began to move—slowly at first, but more quickly when the sails filled out and she felt the freshening breeze. The young skipper stood on the quarter-deck for all to see, but he waved no farewell; on the contrary, he stood quite still and took no notice of the cheers which followed him until they could be heard no more. "What's wrong with the cap'n?" asked the boatmen on the quay. "He looks as if he's seen a ghost."

"Let us go," said the girl. "We have seen him. That is enough. And oh! the weary months before we can see him again! Let us go home,

nurse."

They could not move for the moment on account of the pressure. The whole crowd, in fact, were seized with the same intention—nothing more was

to be seen; they might as well go home.

First passed, walking together, the better sort. Among them Mehetabel Waite, tall and queenly, in her lovely frock and hat. Her cheek was still blushing, but her eyes were bright with triumph. As she passed the other girl she tossed her head and laughed aloud — but she might have been laughing at something said. Then came Captain Waite, talking in his loud authoritative way.

"Yes," he said. "I have confidence in the young

man. I have promised him on his return to make him my partner and my son-in-law."

The girl in the crowd caught the old negress by the arm. "Do you hear, nurse? Do you hear?"

"Yes-sho', child."

"A fortunate young man indeed," said one of the elders sententiously. "Wealth and station and beauty! What more can a young man want? A lucky ship! A lucky skipper!"

The divine saw his opportunity for a commonplace. He uttered it with the air of one who

makes an original discovery.

"Beauty is shortlived. It vanishes like the dew. It flies like the flowers of summer. Let the young man rather consider the solid qualities of our sister."

"Beauty may be shortlived," said Captain Waite sturdily, mindful of past loves. "But it lasts a good bit. Blessed, I say, is the woman who has it and the man who gets it!"

So they swept on.

"You heard, nurse - you heard? Oh! you heard—oh! It is like a knife—a knife in my very heart. That was why she laughed when she passed. Oh! do they mean it? Do they mean it? Will he----?"

Half-way home, after a long silence, the old nurse looked up. "What dat young cap'n say to ye, Missy Ruth?"

"Nothing. He gave me this ring-and he put it on-and he looked as if-as if-he would like to

kiss me."

"Heart up, pretty! What? That young cap'n ever look as if he wanted to kiss Missy Mehetabel? Na, na! Heart up, honey!"

CHAPTER II

ON A NANTUCKET FARM

RUTH BURNE lifted the latch, stepped lightly over the rough, sandy track that passed for a road, and so on to the open moor. Between the gate and the house lay a stretch of rank coarse grass-in England it would have been a garden or an orchard; behind the grass stood the farmhouse -a wooden house of some age, printed a light drab, with green window-shutters and a green door. At one end rose the brick chimney, which, with its open fireplace, warmed all the house. Beside the house were farm buildings, pigsties, and poultry; and in the farmyard moved heavily Jonathan Burne, Ruth's brother, the farmer. It was seven in the morning, and the moor was still wet with the dews or the rain of the night. The sun was high, but the mist had not yet cleared away. Now behold! the summer mists of Nantucket whenever they arrive, which is often, always work a miracle. which is unregarded. For, in this part of the island there are hills and valleys, steep hills and deep valleys. To be sure the hills are not, any of them. more than a hundred feet high, and the valleys are not, any of them, deeper than the feet of the hills; vet, when the light, feathery mists of June fall upon them, they seem to grow higher, higher, higher; and the valleys grow deeper, deeper, so that, to an Englishman, they show like unto the hills and combs on the edge of Dartmoor, except that they have no trees.

Suddenly, as Ruth looked—to be sure, the phenomenon was thrown away upon her—the

mist cleared away; it did not roll away or fly upwards, it simply vanished. Then the hills and the valleys resumed their true appearance, only that the tiny hills looked as if they had been designed for lofty mountains, and the little combs looked as if they had been modelled on Alpine

valleys.

Ruth had been up for nearly three hours; she had milked the cows, made the breakfast, washed up, and cleared away the things, and she wanted to be alone. Therefore, she plunged into the moorland among the hills, the lonely moor, whither no one ever came except herself. Hither she came, when she was happy, to sing and bask in her happiness; hither she came, when she was unhappy, to sit quite still, and give herself wholly to her misery. This morning she was just as miserable as any girl can wish to be.

The moor is covered with a dwarf shrub, which grows low, clinging to the ground as if on a wind-swept plateau of great altitude. Everything on Nantucket pretends to belong to a mountainous country; the air is fresh and keen, and whistles in your ears; on the little hills one feels as if upon a mountain-side; and the ponds and lakes, of which there are many scattered about the moor, are like mountain tarns, as deep and as black.

Ruth climbed the little hill before her and stopped for a moment on the top. She turned, from habit, to look at her brother's farm lying at her feet: an unprofitable farm, producing scanty crops from a sandy and unwilling soil; but the Nantucket farmer regarded his sheep, his turkeys, his ducks, and his poultry more than his crops. The cultivated ground lay along the edge of a low cliff; beyond the cliff was a fiord, or inlet of the sea, a lovely

sheet of water, as beautiful in the sunshine as if it belonged to the Mediterranean, branching out into a dozen smaller creeks. On the other side of the farm lay a black lake; it had no flowers upon it, no reeds in its shallows, no birds on its waters, no boat on its banks; it looked as lonely and as desolate as a lake in the heart of the Welsh mountains.

A few steps farther, and the hill lay between the girl and the sight of the farm. She was quite alone; in the whole wide world there was nothing but herself—herself with her thoughts and her dreams. Not that she made any remark to this effect. But she craved to be alone, and she sat down with a sigh of relief that she was alone.

At her feet was a carpet made of the low close-growing shrub with dark green leaves; on her right was a little coppice mostly made up of the same shrub, only five or six feet high; here the wild vine stretched out its long branches now just coming into leaf; there were the low bushes of the huckleberry; there were ferns; there was the dog-rose, growing abundantly; there was the cytisus, also abundant; there were not many wildflowers, but among them, in green patches, spread and blossomed the dog-violet.

She sat motionless. Then a bird began: it might have been an English lark, so much its song resembled our skylark; but this bird sang sitting on a branch or rail. When he had finished another bird began crying, "Get on, get on, get on." And another followed—a big fellow, who made a grand pretence of not being able to fly, and fluttered fussily. And a brace of partridges got up with a whirr.

Ruth noted these things. She knew them all; she expected them; she wanted them: because, you see, they carried away her thoughts out of her-

self—they helped her to fall into a trance, and to see what she came to see. First, it was a boy with a girl three or four years younger than himself, playing on the moor, hunting for birds' nests, gathering huckleberries, running down the hillsides, or fishing from a boat, or digging for clams in the sandy spit. She saw next a gallant lad going off to sea, and leaving the girl in tears; then he came back, and hurried out to the farm to see his sweetheart. Year after year he went away to the Arctic Seas and came back. The girl had grown a woman: he kissed her no longer; he seemed afraid of her; he looked at her and was silent. One day, only a week before he sailed as captain of the Susan Bell, he placed a ring upon her finger, and sighed and said not a word. Yet what lover was more eloquent?

And now-oh, now !-- he was offered the most beautiful girl in Nantucket and the daughter of the richest man, and a partnership! He would be part owner of a ship-what sailor would refuse such a chance? And what had she, this simple country girl, to offer that could outweigh these

splendid gifts?

Thus she mused, and thus she lamented, sitting in the sunshine on the moor while the wind whistled in her ears, and the sun of early June climbed up

the heavens.

Now, while Ruth sat upon the moor, there came along the road slowly, on account of the deep sand, a four-wheeled vehicle, drawn by a single horse, and driven by a negro boy. In the back seat sat alone Mehetabel Waite. She was dressed with almost as much splendour as if she was going to Court, but that was her way; nobody ever saw her dressed otherwise; her laces and her silks seemed to belong to her and to be part of her. She was

Imperia-my Lady Imperia.

At the farm - gate the carriage stopped, and the lady descended and walked with a majesty beyond her years up the path to the house door. Mehetabel, in fact, was come with the kindly object of crushing her rustic rival. She was by no means ignorant of certain passages and rumours of passages between Will Stephen and this simple country maid. Imperia, also in love with the gallant sailor-lad, looked upon these passages with contempt, yet with impatience. What could they matter when she, the all-conquering, appeared, bearing in one hand a ring, and in the other a whole cornucopia of gifts, of which the first and greatest was — herself? Yet the country maid must be admonished to bear herself prudently.

The door was opened by the old black woman, the nurse. She pulled it open, and stood with her fingers before her eyes, as if blinded by the sun-

shine.

"Call your mistress," said Mehetabel.

"Why," the old woman chuckled, the negro's irrepressible chuckle, "if it isn't Miss Mehetabel! What you want with Missy Ruth?"

"What does that matter to you? Tell her I

have come to speak to her."

The old woman chuckled again. "Ho!" she said; "come to tell her 'bout her young man, Cap'n Will? Tink you done got him, eh? Ho! Ho!"

"You insolent old woman! How dare you

speak to me?"

"Not done got him yet; not yet—not yet—not yet—not yet," repeated the old crone, in a kind of

Gregorian chant-self-taught, because she knew

nothing of St. Gregory.

"The woman's mad! Where is your mistress?" Mehetabel pushed into the great keeping-room of the farmhouse—kitchen, dining-room, parlour, work-room, everything. "Ruth!" she called. "Ruth! where are you?"

There was no answer.

"It jes' 'minds me," croaked the old woman, "of a young lady in Car'lina long ago. Tried to take 'nother gal's man, she did. Den misfortunes came — oh! terrible misfortunes. Tought dey would never stop. Money done gone, friends done gone, eberyting done gone. An' she nebber got dat man. Tink upon dat Car'lina gal, Missy Mehetabel. Oh! she was berry fine and gran'—like you; jes' like you. Tried to take 'noder gal's young sweetheart. Jes' like you. Drefful bad luck she had. Jes' like you, jes' like you!"

Mehetabel turned pale. An old, withered, wrinkled, grey-woolled negress shaking her head and her forefinger with horrid warnings is a terrifying thing. Then she remembered that to be afraid of an old black woman was undignified, and she

rallied.

"Call your mistress, I say."

"Little misfortune first; baby misfortune. Not of any 'count. Den de big ones come. Ah! Oh! Gracious Lord! how big! Eberyting done gone. First one ting, den anudder. Den you cry out. Ah? Den you pray and cry. Ah? Go home, Missy Mehetabel—go wait till dey come, one after the next, all worse'n what go before. Go home, Missy Mehetabel, go home. Not done got him yet. Not yet—not yet—not yet," she repeated in her Gregorian chant.

Before that fearfully wagging head and that shaking forefinger, Mehetabel actually retreated. When the old woman finished her chant, Mehetabel was outside the door. She turned and walked back, with as much dignity as the circumstances permitted, to her carriage. This was an unexpected reception. She had intended, she now said to herself, to present herself to this girl Ruth as the fiancée of the man who was to Ruth a brother. She had wished to make a sister, a younger sister, a humble sister—of her. Now, of course, after such rudeness, kindness was out of the question. Dear Will himself would perfectly understand.

No one, however, likes to be told that misfortunes are coming. Yet why should misfortune come? Because Will Stephen was her engaged lover? Nonsense! As if Providence was going to interfere with a love affair! Mehetabel laughed scornfully. Yet no one likes this kind of prophecy. An ignorant, angry old hag of a negress! Yet there is a certain superstition about the old

negress!

Now, just as they got home an unlucky accident happened. It might have happened at any time, but on this day the accident frightened her. The horse put his foot into a hole and fell, breaking his leg badly in two places. There was nothing to do but to kill the creature. And all that evening Mehetabel heard the words of the old woman ringing in her ears: "First, little misfortune come; den big ones, each one worse'n what go before."

CHAPTER III

CAP'N FAIRWEATHER

THE loss of the horse was a misfortune, but one of a kind that might be expected in a country like Nantucket, where the roads are but tracks of sand, and holes are common. Captain Waite grumbled at the accident, and said no more. The old woman's sinister prediction would have been forgotten but for one or two other little accidents, which kept the prophetic words in Mehetabel's mind. A day or two afterwards she broke her mirror. It was a beautiful thing set in a silver frame, with a chased silver handle. Mehetabel knocked it off the table, and the glass flew into a thousand pieces. She stood gazing at the wreck with something like dismay in her heart. To break a looking-glass is always unlucky; and then there was the old woman's warning. And the very next day she dropped her watch—her beautiful gold watch, made in London by one Bennett, of Bunhill Fields-and broke its works so that it stopped. There was no place nearer than Boston where such a watch could be repaired. And again, the day after, she found that her best fur cloak was eaten and destroyed by moths.

All these misfortunes put together amounted to nothing. A mirror, a watch, a fur-lined cape—a few dollars would set everything right. Yet greater misfortunes were promised. Mehetabel was uneasy.

So uneasy did Mehetabel become that she consulted the Rev. Doctor of Divinity Eliezur Horder.

She spoke in general terms. The subject, she said, caused her doubts. If there were witches of old, why not now? If, in former times, she asked, witches were able to bring misfortune upon people,

why not now?

"My sister," replied the divine, "you did well to come to me. These doubts sometimes fester in the mind. I cannot think that to mortals was ever permitted the power to raise tempests, cause ruin, and bring misfortune, disease and death, upon their fellow-creatures. 'Twere to give into one ignorant hand a power too great for any mortal to hold. True, there were witches anciently, since we read of them, and the law is stringent against their sufferance; but what power had they? On this point we may conjecture that it was limited, and consisted chiefly in terrifying the inquirer. The Witch of Endor was amazed when the ghost of Samuel arose. I cannot believe, in spite of the prosecutions of a hundred years ago, that there have ever been any true witches. Sure I am that a Christian need fear nothing-not all the united powers of all the devils; and as for terror of an old woman — such as a witch is commonly believed to be - I hold it but unchristian folly and want of faith."

What could be more comfortable? But still the cold doubt returned and the terror. Then Mehetabel bethought her of the wise woman. There is always a wise woman. She of Nantucket was also the herb-doctor; she lived alone in a cottage full of shelves and drawers and cupboards, which were stuffed with the herbs used in her profession, wherein she was skilful—and it was whispered that she sometimes practised with the

cards, which might bring her into trouble.

To her, in the evening after dark, Mehetabel repaired. The herb-doctor was alone; a middle-aged, keen-faced, sharp-eyed woman. She locked the door when the girl entered. "Is it you, Miss Mehetabel?" she asked. "What brings you here?"

"I want to ask a question."

The wise woman produced a pack of cards. "You know," she said, "these things are forbidden. Yet . . . tell me . . . what is your question?"

"I fear misfortune." Mehetabel sat down before

the table.

"What misfortune?"

"Indeed, I know not. Tell me if misfortune is

coming."

The herbalist laid out the cards and studied their reply. Three times she dealt them out; three times she studied them.

"Well?" asked Mehetabel.

"The cards are threatening. They promise misfortune."

"Oh!" Mehetabel got up. "If it comes it

comes. Are there witches in Nantucket?"

"There are no witches in America. Once there were. They killed some and frightened some. And the secrets died."

"Could witches bring misfortune?"

"Lord knows what witches could do—or could not. Because, you see, no one knew except themselves, and they mostly bragged. Don't be afraid—there's no witches in Nantucket—and none to hurt you if there were."

Mehetabel went home only moderately consoled. Perhaps what followed soon after this consultation was itself a misfortune. You shall judge for

yourself.

Mehetabel went forth in the afternoon when the sun grew low to take the fresh air of the quay,

followed by her negro boy carrying her fan.

Upon the quay she found her father, and with him a man, still young—not more than thirty or so—by his dress and his manner a sailor and a captain.

"My daughter," said Captain Waite. "Mehetabel, this is Captain Fairweather, of New Bedford."

"At your service, madam," said the captain politely. Indeed, his eyes spoke his admiration of the beautiful girl, so finely dressed, who stood before him. A hearty, stout figure of a man he was, yet somewhat rough; a touch of the tarpaulin still upon him.

Then they walked up and down the quay, talking of the chances in the whaling trade, in which Captain Fairweather was as deeply in-

terested as Captain Waite himself.

He came home with them to supper. After supper Mehetabel placed a bottle of Madeira before her father and retired. Everybody who knows Nantucket has heard of Captain Waite's Madeira. For softness and delicacy it had no equal; nor in these days of vanished greatness is it likely to be equalled in the island. At nine o'clock or thereabouts, the two captains being alone over their second bottle, Captain Fairweather, though this was his first visit, spoke words of weight.

"Captain Waite," he said, "you have heard of me, though you have never seen me before. If you want to know more about me, ask in New Bedford. Now, sir, by your leave, I am owner, or part owner, of three stout vessels in the whaling trade. I have a great house well furnished; I have money

laid out in other houses and in land. I am sober, temperate, and of good character. Very well, then "—he took another glass of Madeira to increase his valiancy—"I want a wife. Give me your daughter, Captain Waite. She pleases me. Give her to me; she shall have, d'ye see?—a man for a husband—as good a man as there is in New Bedford—and she shall have as good a house as there is in Nantucket."

"Sir," replied Captain Waite slowly, "I thank you for the honour you have done me; but I fear you are too late. There is talk of taking into partnership, when he returns, and marrying to my daughter one of my own skippers—a young fellow of merit and parts, now commanding one of my

own ships."

"Is that settled?"

"Humanly speaking, I should say that it is

settled."

"Then," Captain Fairweather rose from his chair, "there is no more to be said. There's as good fish in the sea as out of it. I shall not stay single for never a pretty woman. But—if so be—she should change her mind before I've found another, why, let me know."

This was all the wooing that Captain Fair-

weather ever attempted.

"Mehetabel," said her father next day, "about that young man, Will Stephen."

"What about him, father?"

"Is it understood between you? Have any words passed?"

"For words—before you all—no. But the eyes

can speak, father, and the hands."

"Oh," Captain Waite sighed, "Captain Fairweather is a solid man—a man of substance. And

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he did say, last night—and besides I heard some talk about another girl and Will Stephen—some

farmer's daughter."

"Father, look at me!" The girl drew herself up—she was tall as well as comely, and her dress became her—a rich dress, with a chain of gold and lace at the neck, and rings on her fingers. "Look at me, father! Do you suppose that a man of taste—nay, even a log—an insensate log, even a mere tarpaulin, would hesitate between ME and a trolloping farmer's wench?"

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST BLOW

THEV were in church, the day being Sunday. Neither on this day nor in this place does one look for misfortune. Mehetabel, being dressed exactly as she wished, and conscious of looking her best, gazed upwards, either wrapt in the holy meditation which falls upon many maidens in the Temple, or with the air of intelligent reception which also sits well on the maiden during a sermon.

It was in the middle of the discourse. The Rev. Eliezur was a powerful reasoner, but sometimes lengthy. Captain Waite, as an elder, sat bolt upright as regards his back, but carried his head slightly on one side, as, with the preacher, he critically divided the word.

Suddenly the door flew open, and a man ran up the aisle, terror and haste stamped upon his face, and whispered to Captain Waite, who, for his part, sprang to his feet, and leaving his gold-laced hat and his gold-headed stick in the pew, ran out of the church with as much rapidity as can be ex-

pected when one is sixty and corpulent.

A whisper ran from pew to pew. With one accord the men arose and left the church. And then there was heard outside the trampling of many feet, and a confused, half-hushed tumult of voices which in a week-day would have been loud cries and peremptory orders, and a dreadful roaring, crackling, as of pistol-shots, and a hissing; and through the open windows of the church were borne black particles and a smell as of a bonfire. The women whispered and caught each other by the hand; the girls wanted to shriek; the boys wriggled and twisted in their seats. Two persons in the church alone paid no attention: the preacher, who went on dividing the word from a bulky manuscript—some members, otherwise Christian folk, thought him too learned for Nantucket, - and Mehetabel Waite, who sat unmoved, as if she were above earthly considerations while the voice of the divine was speaking. I believe that she was in reality wrapt in meditation upon a certain gallant sailor, and upon the things that she would bring him; her face and her wealth, her dignity and her position; and on the faithful lifelong service that she would receive in return—a beatific vision.

At last they came out. Captain Waite's house was a hundred yards up the street, standing alone. Good Heavens! A column of smoke rose from one side of it, wreathing in the still air of the hot July morning up to the blue sky, which it smirched and spoiled. Two long lines of men, heated, streaming, black with smoke, stretched from the house to the port. They passed buckets of water

from hand to hand, so that a continuous stream

fell hissing on the flames.

"Never fear, madam," said one of the men, as Mehetabel gazed in dismay upon the wreck. "We've got the flames under; one half of the house will be saved."

The smoke blew aside for a moment. It was her own side that was burned; the side which contained her own parlour, where the ladies drank tea in the afternoon; her own bedroom, her own cupboards, armoires, cabinets, where everything that she had was kept. "Was—was nothing saved?" she asked.

"Nothing," replied the man. "The flames were not seen at first, because we were all in church. They had a terrible hold before we could begin with the buckets."

Mehetabel turned sick and faint. All gone: her silk and satin dresses, her winter furs, her embroidered skirts, her laces, her rings, bracelets, necklaces, chains, her pretty boxes, her fans, her books, her French trifles, the miniatures which her mother had brought from England — they connected her with an old English house—could all these things be gone indeed?

"Gone!" echoed a voice beside her. Mehetabel turned; it was the old negress. "Done gone! Great misfortune! What missy got for dat young

man now?"

Close beside stood Ruth, gazing upon the smoking wreck. Mehetabel thought that her face showed triumph. She was wrong. Ruth was thinking only of the dreadful calamity of fire.

"My daughter"—it was her father, his hands bruised and bleeding, his face blackened, his powdered hair pulled about his ears, his clothes burned, torn, and scorched—"this is a heavy misfortune. But we have saved one side of the house. The smoke will soon stop, and you can take refuge—such refuge as it is—in the rooms that remain."

The people pressed forward and offered shelter. Mehetabel could not bear to speak or answer. She refused, and presently found herself in the rooms

that had escaped.

Escaped! They reeked of burning rafters. The stairs were half consumed, pools and puddles of water lay about; the furniture was dragged out of place; the windows and the sashes were broken; everything was in dirt and mess, and confusion indescribable. Now, in Nantucket even the most stately gentlewoman, if she wants anything unusual done, must set to work herself. Mehetabel took off her fine frock, her gloves, her hat—all her Sunday finery—and, in her petticoat, with a bucket of water, began to clear up and make the rooms habitable at least.

The hard work kept her from feeling the disaster; it took many hours before she had restored the place to something decent. At last, when she had ascertained what was left of their china, glass, pewter, knives, forks, spoons, and napery; when something was prepared for her father's supper, Mehetabel paused and looked round her. There hung on the wall an oval mirror with a gilt frame. In the mirror she caught sight of - herself. Her face-her dainty delicate cheek-was hot, and blowzed, and with lines and patches of black; her hair, rough and draggled, hung about her face; her arms and hands were black with dirt, and red and swollen with work; her petticoat was stained and smudged. And she thought of what she had said to her father.

"Could a man of taste—nay, even a log—an insensate log—hesitate between me and a trolloping farmer's wench?" and she remembered the farmer's wench—Ruth—who stood looking at the fire, pale faced, clear of eye, soft of cheek. For the first time in her life her confidence in herself—in the

power of her own beauty-failed her.

"Child," said her father after his supper, and when there was no more than half a bottle of Madeira before him, "we might have fared worse. It is true that the fire has destroyed your mother's jewels, the family jewels; the molten gold must be somewhere in the ashes, and all your dresses and private possessions. But jewels may be replaced, and so may dresses. As for me, why, my own papers are safe, and we have half the house. In a month we will have the whole again, and my cellar of Madeira"-here he took another glass—"is, thank God, safe and unhurt. We shall not be broken, my dear, for the cost of half a house and a new rig out of frocks and fallals. When that young man comes home he shall see no difference."

CHAPTER V

THE SECOND AND GREATER

A WOODEN house is soon rebuilt. Wood, to be sure, in Nantucket, is dear, because there are no trees. But what matters the cost when one has the purse of a whaling owner? In six weeks Captain Waite's house was rebuilt, painted, and restored from the Dutch stoup at the door to the

deck on the roof, where he could walk up and down, as on a quarter-deck, and scour the sea with his telescope—an occupation of which sailors

are never weary.

The house was something like the Second Temple of the Jews. A creditable building, but where were the treasures of the first house! Alas! they were gone. It is true that promises were made as to replacing them, but these promises were not performed.

And soon Mehetabel found that they never

would be performed.

For at this time, after the rebuilding of the house, she made a discovery - nay, say rather that she received a blow far worse even than the loss of her fine things. She learned a thing that darkened the sun and quenched the light of the moon and put out the stars, and for a time made the whole world dark to her. It is a misfortune that has often happened when women who have lived all their lives under glass, with rose-leaves for a couch and sweet flowers to make fragrant the air they breathe, learn suddenly that all has been sham and pretence; that ruin has fallen upon them; that they are no better than the common herd, and must, like them, work and struggle and suffer. It is not dreadful to share the common lot; but it is dreadful to have been first lifted out of it and then suddenly plunged into it.

The discovery arose with the girl's observation that her father every morning began the day with a face full of trouble and anxiety; during the march and progress of the day, which brought him many liquid consolations, his haggard looks softened: in the evening confidence returned with the rum or the Madeira, and confidence more and more became vauntings and boastings, which were even more disquieting than the anxieties of the morning. Why did he look so haggard every morning? What anxieties were there which made him pale and careworn? Mehetabel, hitherto entirely occupied in her own affairs, began to think of her father's. She became curious; she put words together; she thought and compared. And at last she discovered the whole truth. She learned it, as women learn such a secret, at a leap, all at once, and the whole of it.

She asked no questions about it; as soon as she was persuaded of the truth, she just charged her father with it. "Father," she said, "you have

no more money left."

He jumped in his chair; his face changed colour. "Mehetabel!" he cried. "What—what—what is the meaning of this? Money? Plenty—plenty—I mean——"he stopped because she turned upon him a cold, stern, and accusing eye. And he trembled.

"No more money," she repeated. "You have spent, year after year, all that you made. You have only credit. If this season's cargo is a failure you will be. . . . Oh!" she could not say it.

"Hush, child!" her father whispered hoarsely.
"Walls have ears. No one knows... Yes—
yes—it is true. Who told you? How do you
know?"

know?"

"You told me yourself. You are silent and unhappy in the morning. In the evening over the drink you are boastful. From your own talk I have learned the truth."

Her father hung his head. "It is true," he said. They said no more, either then or afterwards.

But the girl's face began to harden and her lips were set, because deep down in her heart, despite the teaching of the divine, there lay the terror of witchcraft and the pride that would not yield, and the passion that she could not subdue.

Now, Mehetabel was young; she was strong; she was a lovely woman. Therefore, when she looked in the glass, confidence returned. Every lovely woman's eyes are magnifiers when they look in a mirror; they magnify the beauty of the face. And of lovely women there are two kinds—those who value unduly the power of beauty, and those who can never understand that beauty has any power at all. She saw—herself; she thought herself irresistible; she hardened her heart. And all day long she worked and contrived in order to replace her lost treasures of silk and lace with something that might look almost as well.

Her father made no further confession. But he showed from time to time the terror that filled

his mind all day and all night.

"My dear," he said, "there is Captain Fairweather. He hath sent another message for you from his house at New Bedford. He is a man of solid substance."

"Perhaps he is only like ourselves, sham and outward show. Besides, father, you forget I am

promised-to Captain Stephen."

"I have promised him, as well, a partnership. What is it worth? Will he want one without the other? What have I got to give him now?"

"ME/" said his daughter proudly. "What

more will he want!"

CHAPTER VI

THE THIRD BLOW

THE whalers generally returned in late autumn. At this time there was a large fleet of whalers belonging to Nantucket. Almost everybody on the island had shares in the venture.

The fleet began to come back. The cargoes were light; it was a bad year; no single ship showed an average return. Captain Waite's ships were late; his look grew daily more careworn as ship after ship came back high out of water with the same story of bad luck. All day long he paced his upper deck on the roof, telescope in hand. In the evening he spread his charts and wondered where they were. "So late! so long after the rest! Surely a good sign. They were late because they were deep-laden."

One morning in late October three of his ships arrived. Their owner made them out from his

watch-tower, and hurried down to the quay.

As soon as they were near enough he put off in a boat. "What luck?" he shouted, as yet afar off. He could not hear the reply, but his boatmen did, and shook their heads.

He climbed up the side of the first, and was met

by the skipper.

"Very sorry, sir," he said. "Dreadful bad news it is."

"Not a poor cargo?"

"No cargo at all, sir. None. The devil was in the fish this year. We never sighted one. I'm sorry to say, sir, we've all three returned home as clean as when we sailed." Captain Waite fell flat down in a fit, purple, speechless. They loosened his neckcloth, and poured water over his head. Presently he recovered a little. Then they lowered him into the boat, and he was carried on shore, and so taken home and put to bed.

All three ships came home as clean as when

they sailed! Did one ever hear such luck?

Where was the Susan Bell? She had never joined the others. Once, however, they spoke a Scotch whaler who had sighted her. She was then farther north, and the fishing, it was reported, was as bad there as farther south. Also there had been terrible weather up there, with early setting in of winter. They feared the worst for the safety of the Susan Bell.

Some men of sixty die of such a fit. Captain Waite did not—he recovered. He presently arose

and resumed his daily life.

"We are lost," he said to his daughter. "The Susan Bell, I take it, is at the bottom. Nothing can save us. In a few weeks we shall be beggars. It's hard upon me, Mehetabel, after all these years."

"It's hard on me, too," she said. "But what's the good of such talk? The Susan Bell is not gone down. Why should she? When she comes

back——"

At this juncture the other suitor presented himself.

"Why, mate," he said, with the cheerfulness which a purse full of dollars conveys. "Why sit crying over it? You are not the first. Look up, and cheerful! Better luck next year."

"Nay, 'tis too late. I am down, Captain Fairweather. Give me a berth in one of your own

ships, and I will go back to the old trade."

"Not so. Not so. You are too old. And you've been ashore too long. Come, I'll do better than that for you. I'll take your daughter as she stands. Tell her what I say."

"No," said Mehetabel obstinately, when her father gave that message. "I shall wait for the Susan Bell. I am promised to Captain Stephen."

When she walked abroad the women looked after her. She could feel them, though she heard nothing, saying, "Pride before a fall!" Everybody admires pride, and envies the proud, and yet rejoices—I know not why—when pride has a fall.

On the quay she could see among the ships unrigged for the winter the three which had come home without a single cask. Heard one ever such ill-luck? Not to sight a single whale! Luck! What was it but witchcraft—the wicked wiles of the old black witch? Rage and bitterness filled her heart. All that the old woman promised she had done. Disaster upon disaster! Line upon line!

As she stood there, looking at the unlucky craft, she saw the old woman herself, bent and bowed,

hobbling along the quay.

"Ah!" she cried. "What de ole woman tol' you, Missy Mehetabel? Drefful bad luck. What you got, now, for dat fine young cap'n?"

"Go away, witch!" said Mehetabel. "Detest-

able—cursed witch! I could kill you!"

"Seems jes' like de 'Gyptian king. Yet he came down at las'. Why? 'Cos he mus'. What you los', Missy Mehetabel? Mos' all. Eh? Not quite all—though. Go home, Missy Mehetabel. Dar's jes' one ting more and den, like dat old king, you jes' come down. Go 'long. Go home. Go wait for de las' and de wors'."

Mehetabel heard with a sinking heart. She made no reply as the old woman crept away. What worst? What last? Then her courage came back to her. What? To be beaten by a miserable old negress? Never. Yet a day—a week—and the Susan Bell would return, and with her. . . .

She walked home with head erect and smiling lips. Strong is beauty and still it shall prevail.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST AND THE WORST

ALL day long Mehetabel felt a strange dizziness; her head reeled, she was consumed with thirst. If one spoke to her the words seemed to come from afar. She was going to be ill, although she knew it not; she had never once been ill in all her young and healthy life; she paid no more heed to these symptoms than one gives to some temporary inconvenience. Yet in the evening she could not sit up; her head was like a ball of fire, she was seized with chills and tremblings, her teeth chattered. She was fain to seek her own room.

All night long she lay sleepless, restless, hot, parched, with aching head and aching limbs. When the day broke at last she crept out of bed, reeling and staggering like a drunken man, and called the coloured girl, their servant, who occupied the room next to her own.

The girl came at her call; at sight of her mistress's burning cheeks and burning eyes she

implored her to go back to bed, and ran for the herb-doctor. Everyone in Nantucket called on the herb-doctor first, and only when the case

resisted her skill, on the apothecary.

The herb-doctor, none other than the wise woman, came. She considered the appearance of the patient for a moment, and she spoke. On hearing the fatal words, Mehetabel comprehended their full significance, though they were but simple monosyllables, and fell back as one in a swoon.

They were, indeed, fearful and terrible words for any girl to hear. They were words that every girl trembled even to think of; for they announced the grave and burial of beauty: they told her that her power and her reign and her consequence were all over; they told her that she was no longer fit for love and the worship of man; that her wooers would turn from her in loathing; that the most precious of all the gifts that can be bestowed upon a woman, more precious than rank and birth, more precious than wealth, more precious than any cleverness, skill, or wisdom, was going to be taken from her.

Cried the herb-doctor, "She's gotten small-

pox."

Alas! that leprosy of the age had seized Mehetabel. Everywhere, in every town and village, all over the habitable globe there were seen unhappy women who had been beautiful, or who might have been beautiful, if they had grown up without this affliction, walking about with pitted faces, every feature marred and ruined and scarred beyond the power of art to restore its comeliness; sometimes with one eye sunken, its light gone out. Oh! And Mehetabel was going

to join that miserable company for whom nothing was left but patience and resignation, a loveless life and thankless drudgery. More than most girls, this maiden had always thought of her beauty as a gift which was to procure her love and happiness and power. Once she had wealth as well; now her beauty was all that was left to her.

"Small-pox," repeated the herb-woman. now, the fever must have its course; keep her covered up warm. Give her the drinks that I shall bring her; keep window and door close shut."

"Oh, save my face!" cried Mehetabel.

"I cannot help your face," said the herb-woman. "That is past my skill. But they say there is an old woman here who has a charm—a negro charm -for keeping the face. I don't know. She won't give nor sell her secret."

"Send for her! Oh, send for her!" cried

Mehetabel.

And then the fever, fierce and strong, seized her and held her, and worked its will upon her. And her wits went a-wandering, and she was nigh unto death. Pothecary Bullivant came; he bled her; he gave her drugs; but still the fever held her. And all the time she raved of witches and of misfortunes wrought by witches, and supplicated her nurses to find a remedy against witchcraft.

After many days, the worst of the fever left her, and she came slowly to her right mind. Her face was now covered thickly with the dreadful places which belong to the disease and threaten things unspeakable and terrible. Mehetabel called for the glass. She dared to look at her poor face blurred, disfigured, ruined. And she shuddered and groaned.

"Go," she said. "Find me the old woman of

whom she spoke—the herb-doctor—the old woman who has the charm."

She was brought; and she was none other than the old negress—the witch who had wrought the mischief by her sorceries.

"Witch!" cried the girl. "Detestable witch!

You come to mock me."

The old woman shook her head. "Nay-nay -not to mock. Miss Mehetabel hab terrible misfortunes. What she got left? Got lubly face. Where dat lubly face now? What she done got left?"

"Oh, what shall I do?" cried the girl. "Save

my face. Oh, save my face!"

"De cap'n he come home in a day or two. Well, what for save missy's face? Cap'n he look at her; cap'n turn away—so. 'Go 'way, 'gustin' gal,' he say. Den he go back to his own sweet gal. Missy Ruth got smooth face—soft smooth cheek."

"Oh, save my face! save my face!" "Mus' let de cap'n go, den, first."

"I cannot. Oh, I have always loved him since first he was a prentice and went to sea! I will give up everything except him. Save my face-and I will give you-"

"What missy got to gib? Nuthin'? Better let

de cap'n go."

"I will not-I will die first."

"Oho! missy not die for long long time. Lib to be ugly old woman,"

"Mercy! Mercy!"

"Let de cap'n go," repeated the old woman

solemnly, shaking her forefinger.

She would not—she could not. Pride, as well as passion, forbade. She would take her chance. She sent away the old woman.

Next day Mehetabel, maddened with fears, sent for her again. She refused to come.

Then Mehetabel sent again, and the herb-woman took her message. "Tell her," she said, "that I will let him go—only let her save my face."

The old woman came at once. She was now as humble as she had before been insolent. She was now as devoted as if Mehetabel was her own mistress.

"Don' be 'fraid, Missy Mehetabel," she said.
"I save your face. Don' be 'fraid. Jes' lie still
and res' and sleep, and when you well, not a spec
not a spot, nor a pit nor pock shall you see. Oh!
de lubly face! No face like it in Nantucket. All
de worl' know dat. Now shut your eyes and res'

and sleep."

So, whether it was by the old woman's magic, no one knows; or by the power of her herbs, no one knows; Mehetabel fell back and dropped into a long and soft slumber, and on her face the old negress laid a lotion, renewing it and painting it, without stopping, for three days and three nights. From time to time the patient woke, but she was not to touch her face. Mostly she slept. In three days the fever was gone.

"Go sleep, honey; go sleep, chil'," said the

negress.

Mehetabel fell back again. And for two days and two nights more her nurse still renewed the

lotion continually.

At the end of that time she called for hot water and she washed her patient's face. And behold! the cheek was red and white, like a peach in August, and, like a ripe grape, it was covered with bloom; her forehead was clear and white; her lovely blue eyes were humid; her soft hair lay matted and curled upon the pillow, and her dainty lips were parted. "Sho'!" said the negress. "De hahnsummest gal in all Nantucket!"

She showed Mehetabel her face in the glass. Not a speck or a spot, or a pit or a pock upon that

face.

"Take the glass," said Mehetabel, and lay back.

Then she began to cry.

"Oh!" she sobbed, "you have beaten—you are a witch. But I would to God I had given this face to Will Stephen! You are a witch; but you have saved my face."

What mattered all the wreck and ruin and loss

of fortune since that was saved?

"Drefful luck it was, pore chil'! Drefful luck! Now, you see, all come back again—all come back, once you let de cap'n go."

CHAPTER VIII

WEDDING BELLS

MEHETABEL, after her illness, was brought downstairs. The first question she asked was if the Susan Bell had yet come into port. It was the middle of November, and she had not yet returned.

"She is at the bottom," said Captain Waite.

"And Will Stephen lies there too."

"I am sure that she will return, and Will Stephen aboard her. Father, I have been thinking if I marry Captain Fairweather he might take over these ships of yours in partnership with you. Let him pay off the debts and set you free—and then—then—I will marry him."

"My child, he is in Nantucket now. You save me, child. Oh! you don't know the miseries that threaten; you do not know what it is to be poor and humble: I was poor and humble once. I will

tell him this very day."

"Father," her cheek was flushed and her eyes were heavy with tears repressed. But she buried her face in her hands. "Father-tell him-it must be soon-very soon. Father-you don't understand. Let it be before the Susan Bell comes back."

There is one thing that I greatly admire in a sailor. He can never be persuaded that the girl who accepts him does not love him. Certainly nobody in Nantucket ever tried to persuade Captain Fairweather of the contrary. Had an attempt been made, it would have failed. And this was the reason, and none other, why Captain

Fairweather lived happy ever after.

He gave his bride rich gifts; he went over to New Bedford, and returned laden with treasures from India and from China, from the Philippines and the islands of the Pacific. Other gifts there were—things that had belonged to his mother: things brought from England by old Colonials; and he poured these gifts at her feet. They were lace and jewels, and things in silver and in gold. Mehetabel thought it was the old witch prompting him to restore the things that had been lost in the fire. In those days the witch who had defeated her filled her mind.

"I have always intended," said Captain Waite grandly, "that my son-in-law should also be my partner. Captain Fairweather is now part-owner

with myself of my whaling fleet."

They were married a fortnight later. Now, the

bride, being still thin and reduced by her illness, had lost something of her imperial air—it returned after marriage—and looked more maidenly and more lovely than before; in so much that the bridegroom was ravished out of himself and knew not what he said; and among the congregation gathered to witness the function there was grief mixed with admiration that one so fair should be taken from Nantucket to New Bedford. And Captain Waite had recovered his dignity, and looked once more the richest shipowner in the Island of Nantucket.

"'Pears to me," said the old black woman sitting in the porch—none other than the witch—"like a angel. Sho', Missy Mehetabel's a angel from heaven come down to Nantucket. Bress de Lord for angels—and send down anudder!"

CHAPTER IX

THE RETURN OF THE SUSAN BELL

WINTER fell upon Nantucket; winter not so pitiless as that of the continent sixty miles across the sea, but winter with frozen tarns and snow-covered moors; when on the quay the boatmen and the sailors blow into their hands and swing their arms, and murmur dreams of rum.

All the whalers were lying in port, except one. The Susan Bell alone had not returned. Now she could not return before the spring; for either she was gone to the bottom or she was caught in the ice, and the ship's company was wintering in Baffin's Bay.

"'Tis a lucky ship," the sailors repeated, but with less heartiness. Even with ships the luck sometimes turns. It has been known many times.

At the farmhouse above the creek Ruth sat waiting. Her rival was out of the way; but her lover, where was he? A sad and weary winter; to wait, and watch, and listen for a footstep on the frozen snow, for the lifting of the latch; for the sight of the face that—oh! ever abiding terror of the sailor's mistress—might be lying thirty fathoms

deep beneath the cold and cruel ice.

One afternoon in April, when the fleet were preparing to sail with hopes of better luck this year, Captain Waite was on his upper deck, telescope in hand. Presently there came into sight a ship of unusual appearance: the captain could not make her out; she drew nearer; first of all it became apparent that she was deep in the water, almost down to the water's edge-waterlogged, perhaps; in the lumber trade, likely; next, that she was rigged with jury masts and, because she had no yards, she carried nothing but a foresail and stay-sails. She came slowly nearer: it became next apparent to the small end of the telescope that the ship had experienced bad weather or trouble of some kind; her bulwarks were broken; the upper part of her bows was smashed like a nut in the nut-crackers; she had no boats left. And then—then—Captain Waite recognised her. She was none other than the Susan Bell, once his own ship, now belonging to the firm of Waite and Fairweather.

He shut up his telescope—he was now much easier in his mind about cargoes and chances—he walked leisurely down to the quay. There the people were all gathered, eager and excited. She

was the Susan Bell, after all. And the ship's company were all Nantucket men, and she had been in bad weather. "She's heavy laden, cap'n," said one of the boatmen. "Waterlogged? Not she. The Susan Bell might founder, but she would not be waterlogged. She's heavy laden, cap'n.

There's stuff aboard that ship."

And now the men ran down their boats and brought their oars. They took Captain Waite aboard and they rowed off, fifty boats and men, to greet and board the missing ship. And the women came down to the quay—the wives and daughters and sweethearts of the crew. Think you that Ruth was the only girl who sat and waited through that winter? There was lifting of apron corners to the eyes, there were open sobs; there were voices uplifted in praise—a hundred years ago the voice of prayer and praise could be heard openly in Nantucket. And the men rowed lustily, and the battered craft kept slowly on—how slowly!—drawing nearer and nearer.

"All well, sir—all well!" cried Captain Stephen as his owner came alongside. "We're all safe and well. Come, lads, give Captain Waite a hand up the side. Hope you're well, sir. I take it you

gave us up for lost."

"We did, Captain Stephen, we did. But you're back again, thank God, and safe and well. And

how have you fared?"

"Why, sir, as for the ship, we've been nipped in the ice, as you can see, and we've had to winter in the Bay, and commons ran short. And we've had bad weather and lost our masts. I'm afraid there'll be a bill for damages. But here she is, sir, back in port, as tight and seaworthy a craft as ever floated. And not a man in the ship's company a penny the worse. And now for our cargo—well, sir, come into the cabin, though they all know it." He led the way to his own cabin. "Cap'n Waite," he whispered impressively, "there's such a cargo aboard, sir, as never whaler brought home yet. Never yet—never. There never was such luck there never was such a cargo. I could have filled ten ships. Every cask is full; there's tons of whalebone; the ship wouldn't carry another cask. She'd founder with another hundredweight. I say, sir," he repeated, "there never was, since whaling began, such another voyage before, and there never will be again!"

"Why, then," the owner held out his hand again, "I was right, of course. My confidence has been justified. It's wonderful, though—wonderful, after all the trials and troubles we've gone through! As for the rest of the Nantucket fleet, 'twould have been better for the owners if they'd stayed at home. Cap'n Stephen"—he sat down and cleared his throat—"if you'd come home six months ago, you

would have been my son-in-law."

"Would have been?" The skipper's face expressed doubt-surprise. One might also have observed a gleam of hope.

"Ay-would have been. There were words

spoken in this cabin. You remember." "Yes, sir, I remember them every one."

"Words about a marriage—"

"There wasn't time-I was taken sudden-I didn't know what to say. But the truth is that-"

"We thought you were dead," said Captain Waite. "That is, you might have been deadand Mehetabel took and married Cap'n Fairweather of New Bedford. That's all. Against my wishes, it was." (Oh! Captain Gamaliel Waite! oh!) "For I said you might come back, and words had passed. But young people are headstrong. Mehetabel's married, and so—you see—I'm sorry for the disappointment, but she

can't marry you."

Captain Stephen's face became suffused with sunshine—perhaps because he was standing at the open cabin-door upon which the sun was shining. He laughed; he shook hands once more, and warmly, with his owner. "Why," he said, "I always said she was too good for me—much too good and grand. I should have been afraid of her. Come, sir, the last bottle of your Madeira is in the locker, We'll drink her health."

They did so.

"Too good and grand," the skipper repeated with a broad smile. "I am but a simple sailor, a rough tarpaulin. Much too good and grand for me. It's been on my mind ever since I sailed how to tell you this; because, you see, it seemed like disrespect and ingratitude to you, and a scorning, when it was only a lifting-up like of young madam, and due respect to her. I wish her joy, sir; and her husband, I wish him joy; and you, too, sir, I wish you joy, too." He drank off another glass of wine. There was no doubt about the joy that filled his own soul. "I've my own sweetheart ashore, and "-he filled his owner's glass again—"you'll drink me joy, too, sir, I do not doubt. She never had a silk gown and never owned a yard of lace-and she's not too good and grand-"

"I wish you joy, Will Stephen, with all my

heart," said Captain Waite.

Ruth sat that evening, work in hand, by the

fire, the great fire of logs in the chimney stack, the fire that warmed the whole house. In April the nights on Nantucket are still cold. At her

feet, curled up, lay the wicked witch.

"Honey," the sorceress continued dreamily,she was telling some kind of story,-"it shows de hand of de Lord. First de small trubbles, jes' to show what de wicked mus' expeck. She lose her horse; she break her glass; she drap her watch. But she still hard-hearted—de house burn down, and all de fine things los'. And de money fly away—de ships dev come home clean and empty. Las' of all and wors' of all, de smallpox; and den her heart all broke up like de heart of de 'Gyptian king."

"Nurse, it's nonsense. What had Mehetabel's

small-pox to do with Will Stephen?"

"Well, honey. Dar was de trubble, and dar was de sin. When dat gal's hard heart got to be broken, jes' as easy for de hand of de Lord to break it with small-pox as with t'under. So she quite broke up, and marr'd Cap'n Fairweather down to New Bedford. And now"-the old woman sat up and looked alert and alive-"what comes nex'? Oh, chil', you dun' know-you dun' know nothin'. What comes nex'? Eh? What comes nex'?"

"Well, nurse? What comes next?"

"S'pose de cap'n come home, eh? Jump up, honey. Sho'! go put on de Sunday frock-nono-bide here-bide here-better so. Why, I tol' vou de cap'n he come home soon. Run, chil', run; open de door - I hear his step. What? You tink de cap'n forget? Run - run - oh, honey-run and lift de latch and open de door, and find de cap'n dar!"

THE SKY-ROCKET

Ι

TOGETHER they walked in the long June twilight across the fields. They were not very nice fields; the path was composed of cinders and brickbats; the ragged hedge was broken down in parts; there were occasional patches on which green things refused to grow. There was, however, a shallow ditch running beside the dilapidated hedge which contained an unsavoury mud, and there was a piggery at the end of the ditch. And these things on a warm evening in June suggested

the country.

They walked side by side, as they always had done. The young man held the girl's hand; he did not press it, nor lift it to his lips, nor go off into interjections over it; he simply held it. She, who was quite accustomed to this assertion of authority, or submission, as you will, made no objection, and did not withdraw her hand. He walked in silence. Why should he desire to talk? He just liked to be with her; sometimes to look at her; to let her talk as much as she liked; but not to follow her when she went off into dreams. For he was twenty-four, and a clerk in a big house of business, and he lived all day in a world where

nothing happens—not even the unexpected—except what is made to happen by the wisdom and the contrivance of the partners. The world is so to the city man; he understands that what he wants he has to get for himself; in his own interests, he has to be foreseeing and far-seeing; above all, he must never dream.

Therefore, this young man looked forward to a life—he knew no other—of low standards, though this he would not admit to himself; to a small income and thrifty ways. He was a steady young man who always had a solid book going, in which he read slowly, without taking the slightest interest in the contents. He thought that a course of reading in miscellaneous subjects, none of which attracted him, raised him to the level of those who improve themselves. He was a good-looking young man, with regular features and the appearance of responsibility. In fact, he had no vices and felt no temptations, and was, therefore, profoundly uninteresting.

The girl, however, was quite unlike him. She moved as if her feet were springs; she walked as if she were dancing; she talked as if she were singing; she laughed at her own thoughts like a thrush. She was nearly as tall as her companion, who was five-feet-ten. She was certainly not pretty, because she had not a single good feature in her face, except perhaps her eyes, which were quick and bright; but she was attractive when she was animated, and she generally was animated. Her dress was quiet and in better taste perhaps than was found with most of the young ladies who went to the same suburban church on Sunday, and lived in the little villas, jerry built, precarious, bravely facing the suburban gales with their

crumbling bricks, with sand for mortar, rubbish for

foundations, and laths for party walls.

Her name—a ridiculous name, but in the matter of names people are so—was Ariadne. The girl thought it a pretty name, and much finer than Muriel, Gladys, and Dorothy, names which decorated most of the girls she knew. Ariadne—a poetical name. She knew nothing of the story belonging to that deserted nymph. She admired her name as most girls admire their faces; she wrote it down and looked at it, as most girls look in the glass. And, as Ariadne does not go well with Samuel, which was her lover's name, there was a secret understanding between them that when they were alone he was to be Cyril instead of Sam. Then, without a sense of the incongruous she could listen to the voice of Love.

"Cyril," she was saying, "there are worlds upon worlds all round us, and here we know nothing about them. I'm not discontented with my lot, but I wish I could see some of them sometimes."

"You wouldn't like them, Ariadne."

"How do you know? Besides, I didn't say I should like them. I said that I want to see them. I want to see the people that the papers talk about."

"They are just like ourselves."

"No, they're not, dear boy. I know better than that. They don't dress like us; nor talk like us; nor live like us. I want to see the great ladies and the fine ladies, the artists and the poets and the actors—"

"It's no use without money."

"I want the money too. I want to go and live among them and be one of them. Just for two or three years, Cyril. Just to understand

what it is like. And then to come back again to this stupid old suburb and the stupid old people and the stupid old——"

"Sam," he whispered, audaciously pressing her

hand.

"Cyril," she corrected him.

"And then we would be married, wouldn't we? Perhaps I shall be drawing a hundred and fifty by

that time, if I am lucky."

"Married? Oh! well, we would see about that. You know, Cyril, I have always told you that I could never marry a man whom I did not respect for his intellect. He must be my superior, otherwise I could not think of marrying him."

"Of course." This young man knew not the language of compliment, nor even the commonest word in it, nor the declensions of it, nor the conjugations of it. "Of course, I know that."

"To be sure, you do improve yourself."

"I am now, Ariadne," he assured her proudly, "in the heart of Humboldt's Cosmos."

ΙI

IT has been pointed out that the author is not invited or called upon by the public to write; he is not sent for like the lawyer and the physician. That is because he offers himself unasked and in far greater numbers than is wanted. So while he stands up for hire with the rest in the Statute Fair of Paternoster Row, the public go round and make their choice.

In the autumn of 1893 there were produced, among other works of deathless interest, four

hundred novels, most of which remain still unnoticed. With these appeared a story on whose

title-page was the single name "Ariadne."

If you were to read that book now you would lay it down with a feeling that it was a crude and early piece of work, badly constructed, the dialogue managed without skill, and the story naught. It is now four years since that book was written, and the glamour has quite gone out of it. The pages charm no one. It is not asked for; you can buy it for next to nothing; it will soon drop into the twopenny box. Why then, one asks, was there so great, so immediate a run upon it? The smart critic set down the fact to the bad taste of the reading public; the man who understands that the bad taste of the public never by any chance sends that public after feeble writers, took up the book to find out for himself the reason of its popularity. He read it through; the magic of the book seized him; he forgot altogether his purpose in reading the book; he forgot to ask why; and he never stopped until he had reached the end. Then he laid it down with a sigh, and left the task of answering that question to anybody who chose. Every now and then such a book appears; it succeeds; the only explanation of its success is that it possesses some mysterious charm of its own which seizes upon the reader and holds him tight, even as the Ancient Mariner held the wedding guest.

Every year at least two, and generally three, reputations in fiction are made. The writer of "Ariadne" made her reputation by that book. Nobody had ever heard her name; nobody knew anything about her at all. But her book, which had begun by creeping, went on to run, to leap,

to gallop, through the editions. The publisher, who had begun by being grumpy, became first cheerful, then beaming; he had been overbearing at first, with the take-it-or-leave-it manner which belongs to one who confers a doubtful benefit and incurs a possible loss; he became kindly, friendly, affectionate, even deferential. He gave a dinner-party one evening. The author of "Ariadne" was the guest of the evening. Her name, it appeared, was Ariadne Ascott. She was still quite young, not more than two-andtwenty; she was full of animation; she was new to Society, and frankly owned her ignorance; she could not talk of new books, because she had read none; nor of poets, because she knew none; nor of art, because she had hardly ever seen any pictures. She accepted admiration, however, with evident joy. "It is new to me," she said. "You cannot tell me too often how you like my poor little book." There was in her face, in her manner, caressing yet not submissive, something of the glamour of her book.

"I reviewed it in the Daily Train," said one of her admirers. "I fell to the ground and worshipped it, as I should worship the author. Miss Ascott, you have made, believe me, the most brilliant contribution to literature that we

have enjoyed for a whole generation."

"I suppose," he said to another man at the club that night, "that it is all right about the boom of 'Ariadne.' No hankey, eh? Because, you know, I have heard——"

"So have I. But in this case it is all right. I know the printer."

"She'll make a pot of money."

"My dear fellow, nothing to what she'll make

by her second book. I hear they are wiring across the Atlantic to secure her at any price. Man, she's an heiress. She lives at the Langham; she's got three rooms and a maid; and is spending the money as fast as she makes it."

Thus, you see, Heaven does sometimes hear our prayers. Ariadne desired to see these other worlds. Her desire was gratified.

III

SUNDAY afternoon. Ariadne's room was crowded with callers. She was standing in the midst of a circle; the room was filled with laughter and whispers and the buzz of conversation. Suddenly, as she looked round, she flushed scarlet. In the doorway stood, awkward, embarrassed, her lover Samuel—alias Cyril. She stepped quickly across the room. "Cyril," she said, "this is very good of you. Come in and wait till the people are gone, and we will talk."

He obeyed; he stood in the room, unnoticed; he watched the girl transformed. Was that Ariadne? his own Ariadne—this vision of floating lace and white silk, holding her own, an equal, among these fine ladies and these men, whose faces were not like the faces of the counting-house?

Presently the people began to go away. They

all had something to say as they went.

It was her editor. "Miss Ascott, we are long-

ing to begin the new story."

It was a lady whose name was known every-

where. "Dear Ariadne, you must take the chair

at the Dinner of Women; that is agreed."

It was the critic. He was the last. He whispered, "And the answer—when will you give me an answer?"

"I don't know, indeed. When my new story

is out. You must wait till then-

"But—if I may only hope——"
"We can all hope. Good-bye."

The critic retired.

When they were all gone, Samuel stepped forward. "Oh," he said, "if you knew how dull it is at home! Are you never coming back, Ariadne?"

"Why should I?" she replied cruelly. "Look round you, Samuel"—she called him Samuel, and it sank into his heart. "You see all these people. They are the leaders in literature and art. Should I give up their friendship? What have you to offer me in return?"

"Nothing," the poor young man groaned.

"Nothing-and yet-"

"Cyril," she stopped him, relenting at sight of his pitiful face, "I told you that I could never marry a man whose intellect was not greater than my own. You see what I have achieved—a book that all the world is reading. What intellectual effort can you show beside that great victory?"

"I am still," he said, "in the midst of Humboldt's

Cosmos."

ΙV

In the smoking-room of the club again.

"I hear," said one, "that the new story of the 'Ariadne' woman is a frost—dead frost. There's

a shameless puff of it in the Lamp-post; but, of course—"

"Of course."

"Nobody buys it; nobody reads it. She's done for."

"I wonder she didn't marry. She talks well and gets up well. They say she isn't quite—but I don't know. At one time they said that you—"

"Well, a good many, I daresay, at the outset, when we all went down and worshipped her first rubbish, were attracted. As for me, I had a chance of reading the proof of the second book. I withdrew at once from the running." This was the critic who had pressed for an answer. "I saw that the writer had nothing left in her. Up like a rocket, you know—one blaze of light—then down again, unnoticed."

"I'm sorry."

"I don't see why you should be. She's had her run; she has been accepted for a genius; she went everywhere; she's got a splendid time to remember."

V

ARIADNE stood once more in the old familiar side road leading off the main road of the cheap suburb. The little gardens in front of the houses were filled with laburnum, lilac, and lime trees; the time was June; the air was fragrant; the leaves were fresh and green; the place looked pretty. The sweet breath of Spring banished the associations of poverty and dulness and monotony and hid the stuccoed fronts.

"About this time," said Ariadne, "my Samuel

should be coming home." In fact at that moment he turned out of the main road. He was walking heavily, with eyes cast down. When in the sweet spring season his mind lightly turned to thoughts of love, the vision of the lost Ariadne arose before his eyes and saddened him.

Ariadne herself stepped out into the road and

met him.

"You, Ariadne?" He started.

"I told you," she said, "three years ago that I wanted to go away and see those other worlds—and then come back."

"Ariadne?" He hardly understood that she

was actually with him once more.

"Both prayers," she said, "have been granted. I have lived among the other people. I am deserted and forsaken. So I have come back."

"Ariadne?"

"I have come back," she said, "to a man whose intellect I respect above my own."

"Oh, but you are a great author!"

"I wrote one book that everybody praised; another that everybody abused; and a third that nobody will look at. They are all three dead and buried and forgotten. On the other hand, you are still——"

"Still in Humboldt's Cosmos, Ariadne."

"He is an author who is abiding—satisfying. They don't forsake their Humboldt. They don't call him a sky-rocket. I have come back to read, with you, dear Cyril, Humboldt's Cosmos."

AN INDIAN SUMMER

Ι

I T is a long step back to the 'fifties. Why, a man born in the middle of the 'fifties is now over forty; he is past early manhood, he is past the "first sprightly flow," as Dryden called it; he has become what Shakspere calls a "good old chronicle." "Wait till you come to forty year," Thackeray sighed, with a sob in his voice and a tear in his eye. "Never the same man after forty," says another sage. What, then, of the unfortunates who actually attained their majority The 'nineties bring these poor in the 'fifties? creatures into their sixties, after which it is felt by the young, that a man should put up the shutters, and, like Miss Knag's romantic brother, "close the warehouse."

The little history which follows is all about two people who did arrive at their twenty-first year in the 'fifties. Though they were young people they were old friends. It is an astonishing thing that the younger we are the older are our friends. Thus does nature still pamper and indulge youth. In the year 'fifty-one, to be exact, the young man was twenty-one and the girl eighteen.

Twenty-one and eighteen are two delightful ages

for a pair of lovers—over young, maybe, for this cold climate; over old, perhaps, for the warmer air of Verona. But as these two were not lovers, this fine point for critical consideration did not

present itself.

The young man was the son of the Vicar; I believe he had eleven brothers and sisters, all of whom have done well except one daughter, who ran away from her post in a girls' school (which she abhorred) to marry a bagman, and is consequently never mentioned in the family. Yet, by report, a good bagman. One of the sons, too—but we are not concerned with the rest of the numerous arrows of the paternal quiver. Our

young man was the eldest son.

The girl was the only daughter of one who belonged to a class even then becoming rare: her father, in fact, was a Nabob, a retired officer of John Company. He had spent forty years in India without coming home. This girl was his only child: he had brought away with him so many lakhs of rupees that one understands something of the present poverty now hanging over India. He was the new squire who had bought out the old family. Nobody wept for the departure of the old family; there was no sentimental regret for them. The new man neither gambled nor drank nor bullied the people; he was quite a kindly Nabob; but he had one ambition which he did not conceal: he wished his daughter to obtain a coronet, by the quick and certain method open to girls, namely, by marriage. He was of so kindly a nature that he gave the Vicar the run of his library; and the Vicar's sons the shooting and the fishing; and the Vicar's daughters the run of his house; and to

sons and daughters alike the daily companionship of his daughter: more than this, because the boy's father was poor and the boy's future was dubious but probably lowly, he sent one to Haileybury with a nomination into the service of the Company. And if you want to know what that meant you must carry your memory back fifty years, and you will then see, in imagination, the crowd of applicants besieging the doors of the Company: you must behold the myriads, the showers of letters daily delivered at the doors of the Governors, praying for a writership, a commission in the Indian Army, a midshipman's berth in the Indian Navy. As for the other boys and girls, he sent one to Cambridge, and one - but again their history does not belong to us. ever, he was a kindly Nabob.

Of course, the experienced reader perceives, with such opportunities as unlimited companionship, with walks, rides, fishing, reading, talking together, the young couple naturally fell in love with each other. The experienced reader is quite wrong. That is what happens as a rule; in this case it did not happen, although they were really made for each other, and understood each other, and thought about each other all the time. I admit that in this way love may sometimes begin. But the young man knew, and the girl knew, the Nabob's design as to the daughter's future. And there is such a thing as respect for your benefactor's confidence, and even loyalty to a parent's wishes. So that, you see, they did not fall in love.

They were walking along one of the galleries in the Great Exhibition, which, as is related in ancient history, was open all through the summer of the year 1851. The galleries contained the less showy exhibits—the plainer industries, the workaday manufactures; while all the pretty things were spread out cunningly down below. Consequently, there were fewer visitors in the galleries. Mostly they consisted of family parties come up from the country. These unhappy people got up into the galleries as to a position of vantage; they trailed around with lack-lustre eyes; they lost themselves among the cottons and the unbleached products and the furniture; and they wandered up and down miserably till the policeman dragged them out at sunset—limp, hungry, tearful, and weary. Next day they went home and bragged about

the dissipations of London.

The pair had left the Nabob down below while they explored the labyrinthine galleries. They were not looking much at the cottons and stuffs, nor at the sofas and chairs; they were talking about themselves, which is a more interesting way of getting through the time. The young man, on whose cheeks there was beginning the first down of whiskers, wore his hair long; it was also rendered glossy and wavy by pomatum's artful aid; it fell over his ears and almost over his shoulders; he wore "all round" collars, such as Mr. Gladstone used to wear, and his face was full of animation, because his life was just about to begin, and the tall East Indiaman was ready to sail, and would drop down the river in a day or two. The girl, for her part, was possessed of many charms, but the most remarkable was a face whose regular features - almost Greek in outline - were stamped with a certain sweetness and purity such as would adorn a nun.

Surrounded as they were with illustrations—monumental illustrations—of England's greatness

as displayed by her cottons and her stuffs—I do not think the coal was up there—these young people heeded nothing and talked about nothing but themselves.

"Oh, George!" the girl sighed. "You are going away, and I shall never see you again. Papa was forty years in India without ever coming home."

"They come home oftener now-I daresay in

fifteen years—or perhaps—twenty—"

"And I shall be an old woman then. You will get rich, George. . ." Observe that they did not contemplate, in those days, distinguished service and the Star of India—but money-bags—sordid thought! Yet they say that India was as well ruled then as now. "You will get rich," she repeated. "I shall think of that."

"I hope so. And you will marry a noble lord

and be a great lady of fashion."

"If I do, George, I shall never forget you-

"Well, Clarinda"—in those ancient days they used to call girls by such names as this—"I promise that whenever I come home again, you will be the first person I shall visit."

"And I promise you, George, that I shall welcome you as joyfully then as I should now.

Can I say more?"

They shook hands over it with a warm and loyal pressure. I have said that they were not in love. Then they left the gallery and found the Nabob and the governess nodding on a bench beside the Koh-i-Noor; and they all walked away together; the Nabob with the young man, followed by the governess and the young lady. They went to an hotel in Jermyn Street, where at six o'clock they had dinner, and with dinner an excellent

bottle of Madeira, and after dinner a bottle of port—that of '34—while the Nabob discoursed upon India and offered practical advice as to the shaking of the pagoda tree.

Π

AT four o'clock Sir George entered the card-room of the club, where there was always a rubber from four to seven. He cut in; he took his seat; he took up the cards to deal.

"I have seen a ghost," he said. "The ghost of a face—I saw it in a carriage driving along the

Marina-clubs, Queen."

He dined at the club that evening. After dinner he sent for the List of Residents, and also

for that of Visitors.

"It was Clarinda," he said. "I knew it was Clarinda. I should know her anywhere. But what is her name?" He looked through the list. He found her old name—one of the tenants in a certain square. "Why——" He looked up in surprise—"She has never changed her name! How about the coronet, then? I knew it was Clarinda. Never married, and with all that money! Would she be contented, then, with nothing less than a duke?"

He was disturbed all the evening with thoughts of the past. When a man is wholly absorbed with his work he has no time to think of the past. An Anglo-Indian's work is more exacting and absorbing than any other kind of work. All the way along the road to promotion, as this servant of India drew nearer to the administration of a

Province, about as great as France, his work wholly absorbed him. He never wanted to go home; he remained in perfect health; he lost thought of his boyhood; his home, his memories, his associations, were all in India. After forty years the memory of the past came back to him. "Her father must be dead," he said. "I remember hearing, I forget when, that he was dead. And Clarinda has never married. Strange!"

In the night he awoke with the recollection of a certain farewell pledge made in the galleries of

the Great Exhibition of '51.

"And I promised that she should be the first person I would call upon. And I have been here three months and never once thought of her. I wonder if she remembers me?"

III

NEXT day he called. Clarinda lived in a great house. She was rich then—but that, of course: was not her father a Nabob? Sir George smiled, thinking how very, very different was the Anglo-Indian now.

Clarinda was alone. She received his card with a pretty blush. "He has remembered me, then," she said. Her face, save for the setting of white hair instead of the old light-brown locks, was almost unchanged. A little heightening of the cheek-bones, a little more prominence to the features; but the eyes were the same, and the face preserved the ancient sweetness and delicacy as befits one who has lived in sweet fancies and noble thought and maiden meditation, untouched by the

rudeness and the coarseness of the world. She rose; she held out her hand; she looked at her

old friend curiously.

"George!" she said. "You have grown. You are so much—larger—than you were." That was so. The man's head was a great deal bigger than the boy's, it wanted room for all the work he had done; his shoulders were broader—to bear the weight. "And you have the look of authority," she added.

"And you, Clarinda? You are almost unchanged. I saw you driving yesterday. I knew you instantly. Almost unchanged," he added. "Yet it is so long ago. My life is almost spent, and my work is done—since last we met. It is forty years ago."

"We are old, George. Sit down. Tell me

about yourself. Are you married?"

"I have been too busy to think of such a thing. But I was surprised—I confess—I thought of you

as of some great lady-"

"It was my father's dream — but never mine. He died not long after you went away. Since then I have lived a quiet life, which pleases me best."

They talked all the afternoon. Sir George went away at six, but returned at half-past seven—and dined with Clarinda.

"You are never lonely?" he asked.

"Never. In the summer I am at home—in the old village. There is so much to do, and so many people to think about, that I have no time to be lonely. Besides, I have so many friends—first cousins and second cousins and other friends—young people who come to stay with me and—and engage me with their affairs and their troubles.

Oh, there is no time, I assure you, for feeling lonely. In the winter I come here. The house is

almost always full."

"You have spent your life in looking after an ungrateful village, and in helping girls, who don't thank you, I believe, over their troubles. Well——" He could not at the moment complete his sentence.

"And you, George? You have spent your life in working for an ungrateful country, and in helping people through famines and plagues and bad harvests, and I am sure they don't thank you at

all." The retort was quite spirited.

"Humph! Well—the case is not quite the same. A man has got his work to do, and he must do it. As for gratitude, we hardly expect a Bengalee's thanks for pulling him through a famine, do we? And you may say what you will, Clarinda. It is quite clear to me that you have spent an unselfish life, and that you have given yourself up to other people."

She laughed. "Oh, George—the unselfish life, indeed! Why, you foolish boy"—thus they fell back into the old talk—"I have led the most selfish life in the world. Don't you understand

that I like to see people happy?"

"You always did, Clarinda. You used to like making me happy. Don't you remember how I used to inflict all my troubles upon you? And how we talked about India? I believe it was you who stimulated your father to get me my nomination—always the same." His eyes softened. "Always the same. You are not changed a bit." He stooped and kissed her fingers. It was an action of admiration and of worship. Clarinda blushed most sweetly. "And I am more pleased—more grateful, Clarinda—than I can express to

have found you at last, and to have found you the

same as you used to be."

The next day he called again. He had an excellent excuse; he brought with him a box of Indian curios—things he had collected—and presented them to his old friend. Again he stayed all the afternoon, and again he dined with Clarinda.

"Where is Sir George?" asked one at the whist-table.

"Gone to look after his ghost of a face. I saw him knocking at a door in Warrior Square."

It takes very little time to acquire a new habit, even at the age of—well—after forty years' service. Besides, when it is merely to resume an old habit——

Sir George found himself in the society of his old friend every day, and nearly all day long. The house presently began to fill up with young people, especially in the Christmas holidays. The young people quickly understood that Sir George belonged to the house. Nothing was changed outwardly. Clarinda was as full of sympathy for them all as ever; as sweet and as gracious and as wise. They worshipped the best woman in the world just as much as ever; but there was something more. They saw the softening of the eyes when they rested on the tall frame and the white beard of the big Indian; they saw the little flush of her cheek when this companion of her youth came into the room; they watched how she looked upon him when he went away. Others, more audacious, watched the man. The house was full of girls-young and as lovely as Aurora, some of them; clever, with the learning of Girton and the wit of Newnham, some of them. This man, whom it was a distinction even to know, paid no kind of attention to any of them; there was only one woman present, as far as he was concerned. And to her he was full of attentions—the little attentions so natural, so spontaneous, that prove in younger people the domination of Love. What did it prove in this elderly guest-the man of forty years' service?

The Christmas holidays were over; the girls had all gone away again; gone back to their work in this woeful world, where all the girls have now to endure the curse of labour in addition to other burdens laid upon them. Clarinda was left alone. But George came every day. And every morning they walked together on the Marina; and every afternoon they drove together; and most days they dined together.

One day, after a quarter of an hour of silence, during which Sir George had been walking about the drawing-room looking absently into cabinets and at pictures, he suddenly stopped, and, with a

very red face, he spoke.

"Clarinda, my Indian things would look much better in your cabinets than the rubbish you've got there.'

"Do you think so, George?"

"And my books would look very well in your library, which wants more books,"

"Do you think so, George?"

"And, Clarinda, whenever I take my hat off the peg, I think to myself: 'What a pity it can't hang there always!'"

When the girls came again, there was no change to speak of. Only Sir George was at breakfast as well as at lunch and dinner; and he was even more attentive to Clarinda than before. So that, after all, the *petits soins* may mean love even to a man who has had forty years' service; and this veracious example ought to make old people happy, by showing that love is not always the gift of the young, as they would have us believe; and that October—nay, even November—may be, after all, a warm and sunny month.

THE TWO SOPHIAS

Ι

A N afternoon in November: the sun had gone down, but there was still a warm glow in the west; and on the terrace overlooking the garden, and in the windows of the house there was still a pleasant light and the reflected colour of the sunset. Two people were walking together in earnest conversation. One was a lady of middle age, her head protected by a warm woollen wrapper, which lay over her shoulders as well; the other was a man apparently many years younger.

"I hesitate," said the lady, "not that I doubt or

mistrust you-far from it."

"Then why? Why? Since Sophia orders it; since it opens up the way to such a conquest of the spiritual world as has never before been offered to humanity."

"Because I feel that I have long since done with earthly love. Because I regard you as a brother—yes—a brother—can there be a more sacred tie in

a sacred Cause?"

"There is a closer affinity possible. Nay, in the mysterious Order of creation it is by the closer affinity of marriage that you will be able to rise far above the spiritual levels already reached. Other-

wise, it would be with me—for choice—sister and brother—but always dear—always dear." He raised the lady's hand and kissed it—they were alone on the terrace—"Always dear—always dear."

"Are you sure? Has Sophia promised to come to me?"

"After marriage," he replied firmly; "not before. Such importance does Sophia attach to the marriage condition—she promises to lead you whither no man can penetrate; to see such things as have been hitherto granted only to Prophets. My friend Sophia is such a spirit as has never yet been enabled to communicate with the living. She will be your teacher; your guide: by her aid you shall wander among fields never before reached—"

"Ah!" cried the lady, "and to see again the soul of my lost—but what will he say when I tell him

that I have married again?"

"Since it was on that condition—but, indeed, dear lady, he is already very far beyond earthly considerations."

"You think so— But I could not forgive myself."

"You will then, also, be raised above these con-

siderations."

The lady walked beside him in silence. The man, who was tall, with narrow shoulders, looked down upon her with eyes which hardly spoke of heavenly rapture. There was an anxiety in those eyes which betokened some admixture, at least, of the earthly element. Why not? Did not Sophia herself promise to open the gates of the other world by the earthly medium of wedlock?

"Above all things," she said, with hesitation, "it seems a clear duty in the interests of the world——"

"Of long-suffering humanity," he interrupted. "Men are yearning for certainties. It will be your happy—happy lot to give them certainties. Can you not trust Sophia's promise? Could Sophia deceive?"

"Oh no—no! If it cannot be done except by marriage. Give me time. Let me think it over,

Consult Sophia once more."

"I will, if you wish it. But I have no expectation of any change. The words are always the same. 'Her way is by marriage. There is no other way.'"

The lady sighed. "But give me time. Let me

think it over."

"Take time," he replied gently. "Do not act in

a hurry. Take a night."

"No—I must have much more. I must have a month. I must set my affairs in order. I must look after my daughter's interests. A thing like

this cannot be decided in a day."

"Yet, in the interests of humanity, everything should give way. Well—take a fortnight. I shall not press for your decision for a fortnight—a whole fortnight! It is a long time to keep the world out of the Consolations and the Certainties that will be yours to offer. Yet—if it must be—"he sighed.

"It must be. You are going back to London to-night. Remain there a fortnight. Come back this day fortnight and you shall have my decision."

She gave him her hand. He raised it; he kissed it. Then he lifted his hat, turned, and strode down

the garden.

The lady looked after him with a sigh. The sunset glow was quite gone now; there was nothing left except a little pale twilight in the west. Against this belt of light the tall black

figure of the man stood out black and, as it seemed to her, threatening. He lifted his arm for some reason. It looked like a menace. The thing he proposed to her was odious and horrible because— The man was richly endowed; his attainments in the spiritual line were wonderful; yet—somehow—she was a gentlewoman through and through. And what was he? And the reported words of Sophia, his spirit friend, seemed, somehow, to have in them a touch, a strain of the common. Was Sophia, also, not "quite"?

H

AT the same time, in the library, at the end of the house, whose windows commanded a view of the terrace, were two young persons. One of them, a young man, stood at a window looking out; the other, a girl, sat by the fireplace, her hands folded, her heavy eyes and her sad face betraying the deepest dejection.

"Are you quite sure, Madge?" he asked, watching the tall figure below as it bent over the drooping lady. "Are you not making yourself anxious without any foundation?" Here he observed the man below catch at the lady's hand. "Beast!" he murmured. "He is holding it."

"I wish there was no foundation," the girl replied.

"I know exactly what he is doing. He holds out the promise of a wider revelation—"

"G-r-r-r!" an interjection of profound con-

"It is to follow after marriage. My mother told me so."

"He is actually kissing her hand. Confound the

fellow!" but this he did not say aloud.

"And she believes him; and she is tempted by the promise of great powers. Oh, Robin, it is dreadful! The man is a fraud. I am sure he is. He is not a gentleman. He drinks as much as he can. He goes about the house already with the air of a proprietor. He cannot—I am sure he cannot—perform anything that he promises——"

"He is kissing her hand again." But this, again,

he did not say aloud.

"He will make her life miserable. Oh, what can we do? What can we do?"

"Say-he would make her life miserable,

Madge."

"What do you mean, Robin?"

"Say, my Madge, that if he got the chance, he would get everything into his own hands. Say that the undeceiving would come very quick; say, that all the promises would be broken; say, if you please"—he had taken both hands now and was leaning over the girl with a familiarity which only belongs to an accepted lover—"that the gates of heaven would be the more closely shut—"

"What do you mean, Robin?"

"I mean, my dear, that this unholy match is not going to take place."

"Who is to prevent it?"

"I am, Madge. Now—the fellow is gone. For a mere country yokel, Madge, you will confess that I am not quite a fool. Very well. But I have put on to the job certain fellows a good deal sharper than myself—fellows paid for being sharp—they have found out things—Oh, lovely things!"

"Robin! About this man?"

"About the gentleman with the Familiar Spirit-

the friend of Sophia. Things, Madge—I say—things."

"May a body, Robin, ask what things-?"

"Not yet. They are such things as even your mother will have to believe. Not even the Familiar Spirit—not Sophia herself—will be able to get over them."

"Then, Robin, tell her at once - tell her to-

night."

"No, my child. I want to bring them home in a more direct way—in a way which will bring a permanent blush to the cheek of the gentleman with the Familiar Spirit and to that of Sophia herself. And I think I know the way."

"Then at once. Oh, Robin!—if you knew how it pains and degrades me only to see that oily . . .

BEAST . . . taking my mother's hand!"

"As soon as possible, my dear. But—there is this in the way. A certain person has got to come from New York before I can bring off my coup in the most effective manner possible. We must wait, therefore, for about ten days or, it may be, a fortnight. Meantime please not to show any surprise at anything I may say or do. Sit quite quiet. Hush!"

III

THE door opened and the Lady came in. In the warm light of the library one saw that she was beautiful still, though the mother of a daughter of twenty. Her face was full of sweetness, her eyes were limpid; the eyes which belong to mystic, dreamy women; the women who attain to visions and ecstasies and raptures. She sat down, her

head in her hand, without speaking. Madge rang the bell for tea. The Lady took her tea and still sat in silence.

At last she spoke. "Madge, my child," she said, "Robin—I am at a point where two ways diverge. I must choose one of the two. The one is the easy way—the way of selfish comfort: the other, which is the way of unselfishness, will bring happiness—not to me, but to countless millions. There is before me nothing short of a new Revelation. Mr. Leatherdale, children, offers me the choice in the name of his friend of the other world, who chooses to be called Sophia."

The young people looked at each other.

"My dear mother," said Madge, "if we could believe that Mr. Leatherdale has it in his power to

make that promise-"

"Hush! Madge"—it was Robin who spoke—"let us not presume to set bounds to the power of the Spirits." He held up his hand in admonition.

She turned upon him with surprise. A new look of authority or solemnity sat upon Robin's face.

"I have not told you, dear Lady"—this was her name with those who knew her well—"you have been so much occupied with this Medium that I have not ventured to tell you—but—the fact is—from recent manifestations—from repeated experiments—I have reason to believe that I am myself possessed—I do not know as yet how largely—but, possessed of this gift. I too am a MEDIUM."

Madge blushed; she dropped her eyes; she

covered her face with her fan.

"You, Robin?" asked the Lady. "Is it possible?"

"Why not? Shall I tell you some of my ex-

periences?"

"Oh!" cried the Lady, when he ran down, "this is even beyond the powers of Mr. Leather-dale."

"It is not for me to compare myself with anyone," Robin said modestly. "At the same time, my friend of the other world—Sophia——"

"What? That is the name of Mr. Leatherdale's

friend."

"Sophia. It means wisdom, I believe. There may be two Sophias. You know, of course, that there is often a bad spirit who takes the name of a good spirit for purposes of deception. I would not suggest, for a moment, that Mr. Leatherdale's friend is a bad spirit; we can only judge by utterances. My Sophia—I wish she would come to you, dear Lady. She is just the Spirit that you would love: she is all purity; she is an ethereal, spiritual, luminous transparency." His eyes brightened and his cheek flushed, as one who cannot find words to describe his Vision. "The things of the earth do not concern her. I cannot ask her even to consider such things."

"Yet the other Sophia condescends to consider

even such things as marriage."

Robin shook his head. "On the heights where my Sophia dwells," he said, "there is no question of marriage."

IV

THE Lady and the Medium were once more on the terrace. This time it was noon, and a day in dark November. "There is something between us," said Mr. Leatherdale; "I feel it here." He laid a hand on his waistcoat. "So sensitive is my nature, that I feel even the slightest change in your regard for me. Ah! how quick to feel, how keen to see will you be when Sophia has made you her own!"

There was a change. The soul of sensibility felt the change in the half-averted face, the guilty

blush, the cold hand.

"Mr. Leatherdale," said the Lady, "I must

tell you frankly that there is a change."

"Yet I have not changed. And Sophia is

incapable of change."

"There is a great change. My daughter's fiancé, Mr. Robin Collingwood, whom you know, has developed powers of the most surprising kind—in the spiritualistic direction."

Mr. Leatherdale changed colour. "What?"

he asked. "In a fortnight? Impossible!"

"Quite possible, on the contrary."

"The young man is shamming. In a fortnight? It cannot be. There are many pretenders abroad. He is shamming. Probably he wants your money. We must be very careful. Oh! very careful, indeed."

"Robin does not speak so unkindly of you. He

regards you as a master."

"Oh!" He looked puzzled. "What does he do

it for, then?"

"It came upon him suddenly—with a burst of light. He, too, has his own friend and adviser—also called Sophia."

"His Sophia?" Again Mr. Leatherdale turned

very red and looked puzzled.

"Yes. His Sophia. It is not unusual, he says, for two or more spirits to have the same name."

"I daresay—I daresay. Not my experience, that is all. What does he mean by it?"

"You do not understand? Robin has developed

very quickly remarkable powers."

"Oh!" But he looked doubtful. "This development does not, however, affect our relations."

"Have you consulted your friend since I saw

you last?"

"Daily. She remains firm—adamant. She says that marriage is necessary. That duty once performed, she will place you on the highest plane yet attained by living man or woman."

"Robin has consulted his friend on the subject, too. She will not advise. She refuses to mix up

things earthly with things spiritual."

"Does she offer what my Sophia offers?"

"She does not. She says that there is only one way for mortals to understand the next world—and that is—to enter it."

Mr. Leatherdale groaned in anguish and disap-

pointment.

"But she promises one thing. On this day, when I have to give you a final answer. Very well. In the evening, at five o'clock, when it grows dark, Sophia—Robin's Sophia—has promised to incarnate herself—in the library—before us all. And she will then call upon you—not me—to state whether you still desire that I should give you my hand. The reply will be left to you."

"Call on me?-me-to state? Incarnate her-

self? What does this mean?"

He sat down on a garden-seat and wiped his forehead, because he could understand nothing except what everyone understands in presence of a hostile move, that it means hostility. Moreover, this gentleman had talked for so many years—so

glibly about incarnations, spirit hands, spirit voices, spirit messages, and the other world, that when he heard of another man under the same roof in the same profession, he knew that something wicked was intended. When one Fraud meets another Fraud in the same line, there must be either con-

federacy or a fight.

"You will come, then, to the library this afternoon at five? Till then-Mr. Leatherdale." The Lady bowed coldly. The superiority of Robin's Sophia to the other spirit was so marked that her confidence in the latter was more than shaken. Robin's friend was a spirit of finer perceptions, wide reading, and good breeding-in short, a gentlewoman. Mr. Leatherdale's Sophia, it was now apparent to her, was of quite common clay, who could only talk vaguely of things which she clearly could not understand. I think that the Lady was ready to meet the ordeal of the day with the mental reservation that, even if Mr. Leatherdale passed the ordeal—she knew there would be some kind of ordeal—she herself would end the matter on the spot.

"I have seen him, Madge dear," she said. "He seems strangely incredulous. But, of course, the incarnation will convince him, and we shall see, then, what he says. My dear, if it appears to be a higher duty to throw him over than to accept

him, be assured that I shall not shrink."

V

In the library there were no lights except the faint light of a low fire, which fell upon the rows of

books and the chairs and tables. A screen stood in a corner, where there was a second door. When the clock struck five, the Lady appeared, followed by her daughter, Robin, and Mr. Leatherdale. The Medium looked about him with marked anxiety.

"You will sit here, dear Lady," said Robin, giving her a low chair beside the fire. "You, Madge, can stand by the mantel—so." The position gave the girl the command of the electric lights. "You, Mr. Leatherdale, can sit here. Now, when the incarnation takes place, no one is to move, no one is to speak except myself. The Spirit speaks through me."

His voice was solemn. Only Mr. Leatherdale—not moved in the least by the solemnity, kept his eyes on a chair opposite—a chair standing out by itself. The incarnation was evidently to take

place there—in that chair.

"You understand," said the Lady, "do you not, Mr. Leatherdale? The Spirit through Robin will address you."

He turned to answer. "Yes," he said hoarsely,

"I understand."

He turned his head again. He started with astonishment. For in the chair sat a figure clothed in white with a white lace veil thrown over its head. The features could not be seen. He knew that she must have come from behind the screen, but he had not seen her, and the suddenness startled him.

"The incarnation," said Robin, "has taken place. Sophia sits before you—quiet. I speak for her. Now—we must not keep her. Mr. Leatherdale, I ask you, solemnly, in the name of this Spirit—if you desire the proposed union to take place.

Stop! Do not reply at once. Wait."

The figure rose. Madge turned on the electric lights. The figure pushed aside part of the veil and showed a face—a human face—one could believe a living face. The gleaming eyes might be called threatening; the look was angry. At the sight of that face Mr. Leatherdale started up, groaned, reeled, and caught at the back of his chair. When he recovered the figure was gone.

"Is the proposed union to take place?" Robin

asked again.

Mr. Leatherdale made no reply; he glared

wildly about the room.

"Is the proposed union to take place?" Robin repeated. "Reply, man, and have done with it."

"No," the man replied.

Then Robin took him by the arm and led him out. "You will find her," he said, "outside, in the porch. You'll catch it, I'm afraid."

"Oh! It was wonderful!" said the Lady, relieved of the heaviest anxiety she had ever felt.

"Dear Lady!" said Robin, "you have seen the first and the last incarnation of Sophia. She will return no more. The only way of knowing the other world is to go there. Let us remember that."

"Only his wife, my dear."

[&]quot;Who was it then, Robin?" Madge asked again when they were alone.

THE MEMORY CELL

Ι

HEN the Professor first talked to me about the thing, I confess that I paid little or no attention to his words. This was partly because he was perpetually inventing new projects, and, of course, burning to tell somebody; partly because the apparent sympathy which made me a favourite receptacle of his ideas was really assumed in order to hide a natural indolence of mind, so that I only pretended to listen; and partly because, at this time when scientific research is so constantly discovering new things any new theory seems no more impossible than, say, talking to a man at twenty miles' distance, or hearing the living voice of a dead man, or sending letters along a wire. We called him the Professor, not because he lectured, or professed, or taught anything, but because he thought and talked of nothing in the world but his kind of science. Other fellows, he knew, cared about trifles — art — music — letters. For him there was but one subject worthy of a man's attention, and it was his own. He attended to it all day long in his laboratory; and, as he was a wealthy creature, he had a very noble laboratory, with machines of gruesome cunning,

Anyone who would sit there and listen while he talked he rewarded with cigars quite beyond the

reach of ordinary man.

One day—it was in early summer, and a flowery spray of Gloire de Dijon was lying along the open window—I sat with him in the largest armchair procurable, lighting the best cigar in the world, mind and body perfectly at rest, and ready to let him talk for an hour.

"There is a disease," he began—I always heard the beginning, and sometimes the end, just the same as a sermon—"a disease—call it, if you

will—perhaps you prefer to call it——"
"Anything you like, Professor."

"A natural function of the brain, which only becomes a disease when it causes pain: a disease which has been hitherto most strangely neglected."

"Now you become practical, Professor. Cure

diseases, if you can."

It was his habit never to take the slightest notice of any remark, question, or criticism. He just went on. Some men didn't like the habit. With such a cigar, however, I felt that I had no right to be affronted. Besides, he was always so full of his subject that he only wanted to relieve his mind by pouring out some of the contents. He wanted neither advice, nor criticism, nor opinion. His own judgment was enough for him.

"The disease is universal; it is common to humanity. Everybody has it—Kaiser to scavenger. As we grow old it grows troublesome. Many quite young people suffer horribly from it. I know a man—a young man of five-and-twenty—in whom it is like a flame burning night and day within. The agony which men and women endure

from this disease—"

"Is it gout?" I asked.

"——is beyond all belief. Of all diseases this is the worst, because there has been hitherto no cure for it. None has ever been attempted. Oddly enough, no one has ever thought of attempting its cure."

"Asthma, perhaps."

"And we have looked upon it as one of the Inevitables, like death or decay. Yet, while we fight against these, we have never taken up arms against the other. Why? Why? It belongs to the brain. We have had some success with other functions of the brain; we can deal with cells of other kinds; why not with this? Youth is spent in mistakes; old age, for most of us, in regrets, in rages, in self-accusation. Man! there is no more terrible disease than Memory in the whole long list."

He paused, looking through me, but not at me. I understood that it would no longer be necessary for me to listen. Therefore I allowed my attention to wander while the Professor went on.

"Therefore"—towards the end my thoughts always returned—"I shall not yet give my method to the world. Not, in fact, until I have demonstrated to my own complete satisfaction the fact that it is not an experiment or a theory, but a great, a practical discovery with permanent results. In other words, when I have proved that I can so deaden the Memory Cell as to produce oblivion over any proposed period, and even substitute for that period a false Memory causing happiness to the patient—then—and not till then, will I give my method to the world. We have seen already too much disappointment in premature announcements of certain methods and certain

cures. Mine shall be a solid discovery or

nothing."

Now, at these words I confess that I was more than a little startled, and repented me of wander-

ing attention.

"I have already," the Professor concluded, "made certain experiments which are at least hopeful. I must tell somebody, and I have chosen you, as one whom I have already tried and proved"—he knew nothing about the wandering thoughts. "It helps one to talk over a thing, and this is, if you come to think of it, a really big thing, isn't it now?"

"Big thing? Man! it is colossal! But—I say—what about Repentance? If you destroy Memory you destroy Repentance. You confirm the sinner

in his sins."

He replied, with the simplicity which belongs to everything truly great: "I shall render Repentance unnecessary by destroying the only stimulus to Repentance. Without Memory there can be no Repentance. Nobody wants to get better

who feels no pain. Now come with me."

He led me out of his laboratory, which stood apart from the house at one end of a long garden. At the other end stood the house, an old manor-house, partly Elizabethan, with a stone terrace running along the front, and overlooking a lawn. On the terrace stood an old man, leaning on a stick. He was poorly clad in rusty black; his face was pinched; he looked what he was—the man who had failed in life.

"One of my experiments," said the Professor.
"He is that most hopeless of creatures, the poet whom the world will not read. I found him in poverty—which troubled him little—and tortured

by the memory of a ruined life. You shall see what I have done for him." He walked across the lawn and laid his hand gently on the old man's shoulder. "So!" he said, "lost in thought, my Poet? Do you remember old triumphs—or do you dream of new?"

"I was living in the past," the Poet replied.
"We who are old live mostly in the past. It is our chief happiness. We cease to work; the chambers of imagery are darkened; but the past remains. We do not cease to live while our name

still lingers in men's hearts."

We left him standing in the sunshine, his eyes limpid, and wrapt in the happiness of his false Memory.

"Is that illusion permanent?" I asked.

"I know not. The man is old; he has a disease which will kill him soon. I hope that he will retain the happiness I have conferred upon him until the end. You shall see, however, other cases. The first is of a woman whom I found in agonies unspeakable. After a madness of years, she awoke to an understanding of what it meant: the ruin of the husband and the children deserted by her."

At this moment there were no signs of agonies or of any self-reproach. The lady was sitting at an open window, her hands folded, in peaceful resignation. She wore widow's weeds, and was a lovely woman still, though no longer young,

despite her stormy past.

"Isabel," said the Professor, "you should be in the garden this sunny day, not sitting alone

with your thoughts."

"Oh!" she replied, with a sad smile, "how can I be alone, dear friend? I have always with me my dear children and my husband.

Death cannot part us—nor can it deprive me of past happiness. I have no present; my mind is in the past or in the future, with my dear ones."

We passed on. "And that illusion?" I asked.

"I believe it will endure. She is at peace now. Her Memory for a period of twenty years is entirely destroyed. A false Memory takes its

place. I have done this for her."

We entered the house. He took me into his library, a large room containing many thousands of books, wherein a young man of twenty or so was at work. He lifted a bright, intelligent face and smiled greeting.

"Getting on, Harry?" asked the Professor.

"Go on—we are not come to disturb you."

"I am doing very well," he replied. "The only thing that troubles me is that I shall finish before long."

"Then we will find something more for you. Don't hurry. Don't hurry." He pretended to

consult a book, and we went out.

"That boy," said the Professor, "has been imprisoned for a year for embezzling his employer's money. As usual, for the sake of a worthless girl. His life is ruined. What have I done for him? He has forgotten the girl and his employer, and the crime and the prison. He thinks he came to me from school; he is quite happy."

"Will his illusion last?" I asked.

"I do not know. Perhaps. If it does not, I must find another. I shall now show you a case on which I have expended all my skill. If this case succeeds, then I shall have no doubt whatever as to my discovery."

He led the way along the corridor and stopped before a closed door. "This," he said, "is a case of rescue. The three you have seen are cases of disappointment or of remorse. This is one in which an innocent child has been cursed for the sins of his father. Think of everything that is abominable; exhaust your experience of human wickedness; picture all the shame and infamy that can disgrace a name, and you will still be far below the truth. With this story behind him-public property, mind-it would be impossible for the boy to enter upon any career, to belong to any profession, or even to live among respectable people; every avenue would be closed to him. It would be necessary to live in the depths. His name must be purged for three generations at least before it can hope to rise and begin again. Well, I bought the boy of his villainous father, who does not know the name of the purchaser. I have begun by destroying in his brain the whole memory of his life from the very beginning. He remembers nothing. So far we have got. I have now to reconstruct the past for him. This has to be done very carefully. He will be an orphan, and my ward; he will have no relations; his parents are dead; his father was, if you like, a traveller, who died-where?-in Patagonia, perhaps. His mother was, if you like, a Brazilian—eh?—relations unknown. His cousins —why has he no cousins? Family quarrels, I suppose. And he is my ward. You can just look in, but he must not be disturbed."

He opened the door. A boy of fourteen or so sat upright in a chair, his hands hanging listlessly at his side, his eyes absolutely vacant; there was nothing behind those eyes—no memory, no understanding. One shuddered at the vacancy of mind indicated by those eyes.

indicated by those eyes.

With him sat a nurse, waiting upon him. "There is no change," she said. "He sits all day like this; he never speaks, he only murmurs.

I have to feed him; he knows nothing."

"So far," said the Professor, "we have done very well. Look at the child, my friend. Is there any Memory here? It is gone, I hope, for good. Better to have no Memory at all than the Memory that was within him when I got hold of him. Poor lad! You shall never know that your father was the notorious Edward Algernon Stievedore, who was expelled the Army for cheating at cards; that he is a common rogue and swindler; that he drove your mother mad with his villainies; and that he sold you, his only son, for a five-pound note. You shall have brighter recollections than these."

"I suppose," said the nurse, "that he will have

to recollect things whatever you do."

"You think so, do you? Very well—very well. I will ask you what you think in a week or two. Give him a week or two, and you shall see a new light in those fishy eyes; you shall find such a boy as you never expected. Look at the shape of his head. There is intellect in the brow, resolution in the chin, tenacity in the jaw, the power of ruling in the nose. This boy, nurse, is born for courage and for success."

"Poor lad!" said the nurse hopelessly. "He doesn't look like it, just at present. To be sure, I have never seen an idiot yet with such a

head."

"Now," said the Professor, outside the room, "I have shown you what I am doing. Forget, if you can, my secret. Let me be the first to divulge it, as soon as I am satisfied with my

results. If you yourself," he looked at me with the wistfulness of one who wants to perform another skilful operation, "have anything on your mind—any little murder, robbery of trust money, forgery, betrayal of innocence, lost opportunities, chances thrown away—don't hesitate to come to me. Immediate relief I can promise, at least."

At that period of my life Memory had few reproaches. I thanked him, and went away

pondering on this strange experience.

This talk took place in the month of June and the year 1884. After the summer holiday, in October, I called again upon the Professor. His housekeeper received me. Her master, she said, was gone. There had been death in the house. The old gentleman who wrote such beautiful verses had died, making a truly edifying end; and the lady whom the master called Isabel was also dead—gone to rejoin her children, she said; and then the master went away, taking with him his private secretary and his ward. I asked about the latter. He had come through his illness bravely, and now there wasn't a livelier young gentleman anywhere.

H

TEN years passed before I saw the Professor again. When a man goes abroad and stays there for a few years, he drops out of the groove, and his place is filled up. Most of the old set were married, and marriage separates the company of those who start together. I had quite forgotten the Professor's secret; if I ever thought of it at all, it was as part of his general crankiness. I met

him at a metropolitan station; he greeted me warmly as if we had parted the day before. I reminded him that it was ten years since we had last met. Then I remembered the occasion. "And how," I asked, "has the great Experiment on the Memory Cell succeeded?"

"There's my train," he replied abruptly. "Meet me to-morrow morning, at ten, at the entrance of the High Courts of Justice, and you shall see."

We sat in the gallery of a Court, whether of Queen's Bench or Chancery, I know not; nor does it matter. Down below, the Court was filling up rapidly. The barristers sat in a row; below them the solicitors; at the side stood the clerks with bags; the jury waited to be called; the witnesses already trembled in their seats. Presently the Judge appeared; the barristers rose, and the business of the day began.

"He's among them," murmured the Professor.
"He is Junior in a case set down for hearing today. There he is, talking with the solicitor, I

suppose. That's my ward."

Truly a handsome young man, tall and brave

of aspect.

"Does he look as if a dreadful past weighed him down?" the Professor went on. "Not a bit. He's a Fellow of his college, first class in classics and in law, he has been called six months, and he has already made a beginning. Ten years since I showed you the case, and all that time not a glimmer—mind! not a glimmer—of the truth has reached his brain."

"And now you will give your discovery to the world?"

"Now, I believe, I may." He heaved a deep

sigh. "One is not worthy—no one is worthy—of such honour as will be mine."

The case began. It was one of a disputed will. Fifteen years ago, as our Junior opened the history, there was a profligate youth who had a considerable fortune, which he was spending, after the manner of his kind, among sharps and drabs. This young man, while yet the bulk of his fortune remained, fell sick unto death, and was, in fact, expected to die. While he was at the worst, in the middle of the night, and when the end was looked for every moment, the man with whom he mostly consorted, a very notorious person who passed by the name of "The Colonel," or Colonel Tracy, called up the landlord of the house in order to witness with himself the signing of the sick man's will. Next day, however, contrary to expectation, the patient began to mend, and in a short time he was taken away by his friends; he mended his morals as well as his health, and returned no more to his former companions, but lived soberly until his death, which had happened quite recently. And then an unexpected will was produced. It bequeathed the whole of the testator's property absolutely to a certain woman whose character, like that of the man known as "The Colonel," was of the worst kind possible. No later will could be found. Investigations showed that the circumstances attending the drawing up and the signing and the witnessing of the will were highly suspicious, and this action was brought in order to set it aside.

The case was one of those in which the story comes out quite plain and clear. The young drunkard; the man who encouraged him, egged him on, and plundered him; the sudden illness;

the crafty attempt to secure the dying man's fortune—all this was easy to understand. But there was the signature, strong and unmistakable; there were the two witnesses to the signature. Undue influence is not an easy thing to establish. And plain forgery, in such a case, may be suspected, but cannot well be proved.

For reasons which you will understand immediately, I do not know how the case ended. I believe they generally compromise such cases.

So far as I assisted at the hearing, they called four witnesses. The first of these was the lady to whom the estate had been devised. She was quite a common person, about forty years of age, dressed with some smartness. As to her own part in the business, there was nothing that she desired to conceal. Colonel Tracy gave her the will, telling her that the young fellow hadn't died after all, but was fetched away by his friends, which was a piece of terrible bad luck; that she must keep the will, because the young Juggins was sure to drink himself to death before long, and it might be useful. She had kept the will, therefore; she found out also where the young man lived and used secretly to watch him; when, after fifteen years, he died, she went to a lawyer and gave him the will. She was never, so to speak, a friend of the deceased, but she had seen him in the Colonel's company. The Colonel was a sporting man. She knew very well that the Colonel was sharping the young man; she did not know why the estate was left to her. The Colonel told her about it when he gave her the paper. If the thing had come off, probably the Colonel would have had most of the money, because at that period the Colonel could have had everything that belonged to her, so noble an opinion had she formed of him. The lady's evidence, of which this is only a portion, revealed an interesting glimpse of life where there are no

foolish restraints of honour or self-respect.

When she retired, the medical man who had attended the young gentleman was called. He said that as appeared in his notebook the patient was apparently dropping into a comatose condition on the evening in question; that he himself expected to learn that he had died in the night; that he did not think it likely, from the patient's condition, both in the evening and the morning, that he could collect his thoughts sufficiently to make a will. He would not, however, say that it was impossible.

The third witness was the landlord of the house. He said that he remembered the incident perfectly: he was called up in the dead of night; the Colonel placed the pen in the sick man's hand; to the best of his recollection the man signed his name; could not say if the Colonel guided his fingers;

then he and the Colonel witnessed the will.

The fourth witness was called by the name of Herbert Shelley. His appearance caused some interest, because he wore the garb of a convict.

At this point the Professor began to show signs of great emotion. He started; he changed colour; his hands trembled; he gazed hard at the witness; he looked anxiously at his ward—signs at which I

vaguely wondered.

The man was tall, and had a look of distinction even in that grisly uniform. His features were sharp and clear: a pointed chin; thin, firm lips, keen eyes, and the nose of the soldier. He showed neither shame nor bravado as he stood up before all; he might have been standing on the hearthrug

of a club, so easy and self-possessed was his bearing.

Our Junior conducted the examination, armed

with his papers.

"You were tried and sentenced," he began, "under the name, I believe, of Herbert Shelley?"

"I was using that name at the time," he replied calmly. "I was sentenced, if the statement will save you a question, for obtaining money under false pretences."

"Quite so. At an earlier period—fifteen years ago — you called yourself sometimes Colonel

Tracy."

"Herbert Tracy I called myself. My friends called me Colonel."

"I did not know that name," murmured the Professor. "It is the man. It is the man."

The witness then proceeded to narrate the circumstances of the will. The man thought he was dying; he requested witness to draw his will; witness found a form of Will in Letts's Diary, and copied it out; he asked the testator to whom he left his estate; testator replied to Susan Cheriton; witness inserted the name; called up the landlord, and the testator signed. Next day he began to get better; a few days afterwards his friends took him away: then witness gave the girl the will, told her what a near thing it had been, and advised her to keep the paper. That was all he knew of the matter. Why had the testator bequeathed his whole estate to this girl? Witness did not know; it was not a time for asking questions. Was naturally pleased at the choice as the lady's friend.

"You have passed under other names, I

believe?"

"Under many names. I have lived by my

wits. The profession necessitates a change of names."

"The trouble to which you referred was connected with a bogus company, was it not?"

"It was. I had eighteen months' imprisonment for it."

"You have been a betting-man, a card-sharper, a billiard-player, a writer of begging letters?"

"I live by my wits," he repeated. "That means

that I use my wits."

"Quite so. Quite so. You were Mr. Herbert Shelly, alias Colonel Tracy, alias other things. You were once, even, a gentleman, I believe?"

The man winced—but only for a moment.

"I was," he replied.

"And you held the rank of captain in a regiment of the line? You sent in your papers by request of the colonel on account of a charge of cheating at cards?"

"There was such a charge. I resigned my

commission and my clubs."

"You were married to a lady of fortune, whose estate you squandered?"

"Say, rather, enjoyed. I enjoyed it very much

as long as it lasted."

"What was your name at that time?"

"My name was Edward Algernon Stieve-dore."

Then a most extraordinary thing happened. Counsel suddenly started, stared at the witness, and then—I understand it now, though at the moment I wondered—a look of recognition or recollection flashed in his eyes. He dropped his papers; he clutched at the desk before him. His face became livid: horror, shame, loathing, terror—as I now understand the effect of these emotions

—appeared in swift succession before him: the people, staring, thought he was seized with violent pains. He swayed this way and that, and spoke

in a changed, husky voice.

"You are the notorious Edward Algernon Stievedore," he said slowly. "You were expelled the Army for cheating at cards, you have become a common rogue and swindler, you drove your wife mad with your villainies, you sold your son for a five-pound note, and you are there—and I——"He fell forward in a fit.

"It is his own father," said the Professor, "and

his Memory has come back to him."

He rushed down the stairs and met the people in the corridor carrying out the unfortunate Junior, still unconscious.

They carried him to King's College Hospital at the back of the Courts. Here he presently recovered consciousness; but he looked dazed and miserable when the Professor put him into a

conveyance and carried him away.

The incident was noted in the evening papers and on the bills. "Sudden Illness of a Barrister in Court." No one knew, and no one guessed, the cause. In the evening, thinking on this strange affair, I remembered that the last words spoken by the young man in Court were the very words used by his guardian ten years before, when he showed me the boy and told me something of his history. He had succeeded, at that time, in destroying the boy's Memory. Were the first, new impressions on that white sheet which had contained the memories of fourteen years—those plain and unmistakable words?

The Professor, a few days afterwards, called upon me. He was much dejected. "I have had

a most terrible time," he told me. "I have been loaded with reproaches. The boy has been driven nearly mad with shame and loathing; he threatened suicide; he said he could never return to his work. I told him all. He heard it and asked for more—seemed as if he wanted to pile up the disgrace."

"Well?"

"Nobody knows the truth, except you and me. Nobody suspects it; nobody can ever find it out. My ward doesn't know it, either. He has now gone back to chambers."

"He accepts his lot?"

"Such a lot can never be accepted. No, sir. I have removed a patch or two from his Memory. That is all. His recollection of the Court ends with the first part of that abominable villain's evidence; he thinks he was seized with a fainting fit; all that followed, including his shame and his misery, has been expunged. He has since, by my advice, consulted a physician, who says—ah!—yes—that it was overwork. He knows nothing; and I hope will have no recurrence of his late attack. Meantime, I think I shall not divulge my discovery until I am better satisfied. I want to make such a recurrence of the past impossible. Give me ten years more."

THE LONG GAME

CHAPTER I

THE SITUATION

"For my own part," here interposed my Father-in-law Elect, who had hitherto said nothing, "I do not regard the situation with any apprehension."

"Good Heavens!" I replied. "Why, it is simply

desperate!"

"You forget, Tom, that I have Friends."

"Oh! Friends!" Put into this interjectional repetition all that you can find of impatience and irritation. Observe how an actor expresses or indicates impatience and irritation, and attribute

this gesture to myself.

It may be observed that the dignity of a fatherin-law elect is a thing to be held sacred, if only for
two reasons. First, because the mistress of your
affections regards that dignity as a family treasure:
and next, because the old man generally carries
the bag. When he has become an actual fatherin-law and has done all he is going to do with his
bag, then, perhaps, one may lower by degrees the
attitude of reverence. In this case you will forgive
my momentary contempt and irritation when you

learn that these fine Friends of his were nothing but ghosts; spooks, I called them. Apparitions, spectres, wraiths, elves, fairies, banshees, white ladies; every living thing that belonged to the other world were his Friends. Nobody more stoutly advocated the existence, the accessibility, of these ethereal creatures; no one had talked so much with them, or knew so many of them, or could call them up so readily. He did not call them their ugly names of ancient folk-lore; he thought they were all spirits of the blessed: not

angels, but souls of men and women.

Nelly looked at me—to return to my exclamation—reproachfully. I had done my best to teach her not to believe in the Friends; she now considered that belief as proof of the extreme goodness and exalted simplicity of her father's nature; it was, she thought, an illusion which could only happen to a mind of the finest and highest order; he was like one of those mediæval saints who used to see visions and have ecstasies. His belief became to her a proof of the depth and reality of her father's religion. Therefore, she could not endure the irritation of my manner and the contempt of my voice.

"My Friends, Tom," the father-in-law replied with conviction, "know very well all that I have done for them. My life has been spent in amassing materials for their history. Those three folio volumes"—he pointed to the table on which reposed his monumental, but hitherto unpublished, work, "cannot be given to the world unless I have the money to produce it, because no publisher will take it up. If, therefore, I do lose the means of producing my work my Friends will have to remain in obscurity. Without an historian where is the

greatness of popular belief? Do you imagine, Tom, that my Friends are going to desert me at such a moment as this? Why, the work of forty years might be seized and sold for waste paper!"

Who would think, to look at the old man, that he really believed all this? It was the face of a philosophic poet; calm, reflective, serious, as becomes one battling for ever with the difficulties of thought and expression. He sat among the books-all about spooks-and faced the situation with the confidence of blind faith. His Friends were real to him. As to their appearance or communication with him he was reticent; he did not communicate these particulars; he only declared that he called them when he wanted them. It was an interesting power to possess. Indeed, you could not name any leading character in any legend, in any superstition, in any supernatural history, who could not become, by means of this power, a close and intimate personal friend. ghost would not love a man who honestly did his best to assign him a place in the ghostly hierarchy and to rescue his name and history from oblivion?

"I cannot believe," said Nelly, "that my father could possibly communicate with evil spirits. It is you who call them fairies and elves and banshees. To him they are whispers from the Better World. If we believe in the Better World—and hope for it, and have the faith which will lead us into the Better World—then, oh! then, why cannot we believe that the soul may be permitted converse,

even on earth, with those who live in it?"

"But to print—to print in cold blood what they

say, Nelly."

"Why not, if what they say will help us on? We print a sermon by a man who must build up

in faith at the best. Why not a message? For my own part, I believe that if these things are intended to help the world upwards, a way will be found to give them to the world."

So, you see, there were two who believed. It was a harmless form of belief, as a rule; at this juncture, it promised to be a mischievous belief.

For we were face to face with a serious danger. It was one of those dangers which one sees afar off, small at first appearance, but growing larger and larger every day, and advancing nearer and nearer until it hangs over one and threatens ruin and destruction.

The Father-in-law Elect, this remarkable man of science,—not yet a F.R.S., as of course he ought to be,—possessed certain farms in the county of Essex, and, I suppose, certain houses, messuages or tenements upon those farms. When he entered upon his inheritance, they were all let on good terms: he was a well-to-do country gentleman; one who could live much as he pleased and could lay out his life on any reasonable lines. He chose the inexpensive way of truth-seeking in the line I have indicated. The machinery of his profession required, in fact, nothing but a fair library and an occasional visit to the Reading-Room of the British Museum. That was his record: landowner, student, scholar; an unworldly, unpractical, retiring man.

Now consider the situation which this man of

faith regarded with so much complacency.

In fulness of time he married; not being in any hurry about this important step: I believe he was already forty, and acquainted with a great many spirits before he thought about marriage. However he did marry, and afterwards found himself possessed of a son and a daughter.

The remarkable history that follows begins with the history of the son. Now I have taken some pains to find out something that may account for the son's conduct. I have examined into the family history. From father to son they have always been Essex gentlefolk, hearty and hardy, fond of sport, but without any known kind of vice; certainly not vice unrestrained and not to be restrained. No theory of heredity could account for it, unless one imagines a "throwing back" a very long way—to some prehistoric ancestor—perhaps a warrior of the early East Saxons.

At school the son was a steady lad, of good, not brilliant, parts. At Cambridge he took a college scholarship and went in for Classical Honours; he came out a low first; it was the first time in the family history that any of them had ever taken a first class. There was great rejoicing on the home-

coming of the triumphant scholar.

He entered at Lincoln's Inn. Then we began, of course, to inquire into the real meaning of the profession, of which we only knew, vaguely, that members of it went on circuit, and were made judges, and so forth. We were delighted to find, on investigation, that it was a profession full of the most beautiful prizes, both of honour and of income. We pictured our First Class scholar as Q.C., Solicitor-General, Judge, Lord Chancellor, bringing a peerage into the family. Oh, what a happiness to have a son who would raise his people from the position of mere gentlefolk to the rank of nobles! Fond thoughts! Illusory hopes!

One day there came a letter. When my Fatherin-law Elect read that letter he first looked bewildered; then he laid it down and gazed round the room, as if making sure that everything was there; then he read it again, and his face became ashen grey. He tossed it across the table and said, "Tom—for God's sake—read it."

It was a letter from a solicitor. And this is what

that letter contained -

"It is with the greatest grief that I execute the task which has been laid upon me by your son, my client.

"It is best to state the case plainly. He has had a run of ill-luck of late in his play. He finds himself indebted to the amount of £12,000. As a debt of honour, this liability should of course be discharged immediately. Under these circumstances there is no alternative for him but to lay the matter before you. I shall be prepared to give you further particulars as to the persons to whom this sum is due. They are all gentlemen of the highest position and honour, with whom your son has played for a long time—up to the present without serious loss. I may add that the whole amount was lost in a single night, and that until the play ceased your son had no idea of the extent of his losses."

At this point I call your attention to the fact that the Hope of his Family had never by word or act given his friends the least reason to believe that he ever played for money, or ever touched a card save at the domestic whist for sixpenny points. You may therefore imagine the consternation into which this letter threw the family circle. The word consternation is not nearly strong enough. There is no word strong enough. At that single blow—by the arrival of that letter—down went the Hope of the Family; down went the Idol of the Family; down, down, never to get up again, went the one young man in the world who could do no wrong. Down he went, with a crash like the

multitudinous smash of all the china in the house.

And he could never be set up again.

As for the many difficulties in the case: the time when he first began to play; the manner in which the madness fell upon him; how the quiet lad was first tempted to gamble; why he had not come to grief long before; how, being a young man of moderate means only, he was admitted to the circle which, as was afterwards learned, consisted entirely, except for himself, of very wealthy young men, careless about losing a few thousands which they would afterwards recover: I can tell you

nothing, because no one ever discovered.

There are many, many misfortunes to expect in this world, but that a quiet, sedate lad should suddenly become a reckless gambler is a thing which one does not expect. Most vices grow. The young man who is going to become a drunkard begins by developing a thirst beyond the common for tea, or for plain cold water. Every vice has its beginning, but no one could ever recollect that Harold had ever shown the least inclination to the madness of play, so that it was like a snowstorm from a clear sky in July when one learned that our future Lord Chancellor had been spending all his time with a company of young men, gambling; that he belonged to a club where play went on all night; and that he had gambling debts amounting in all to the sum of £12,000.

Every year, I am told, sees the appearance, and the disappearance, of two or three such young men. When they lose they drop out, ruined; they go away; they go under; they are no more seen. In the matter of gambling I really think that no country can produce a more remarkable record

than our own. There are brave and soul-stirring stories of Italians, Spaniards, Russians, Chinese, Mexicans, and others, but there are no stories really finer than those of our own heroes. The Chinaman gambles himself into slavery. young fellow will gamble not only himself, but his children, and his grandchildren, into the slavery of poverty, obscurity, and dependence, at a single sitting. He loses; he goes away; he has lost friends, fortune, reputation, and profession: the past, which should have been so useful to himthe honour of his name and his people and their friends, that is what the past means—is lost: the present—his own position and ambitions—is lost: therefore the future is lost. He goes down among the husks; his children, if they try to rise, must climb with difficulty, and with no one to help them, from the very lowest rung of the ladder. To the third and fourth generation they will suffer from the madness of this young man.

I do not think that it should be in the power of any young man to wreck his family, as well as himself, by his follies and extravagances. Harold was of age; he had chosen to play for more than he could lose; the thing in itself is dishonourable; that fact is recognised in the expulsion of a player who cannot pay his losses. Let him get out of his difficulties as he can; if his father wants to help him, the other sons and daughters should protest.

"I have consulted my Friends," said Harold's father, a few hours later. "Their opinion is unanimous. The White Lady was very strong upon it—yet sympathetic, as belongs to the sweetness of her nature. The Bishop simply laid down the principle. The General agreed. I must at any cost pay the debts of this unhappy boy."

He did. He raised the money on mortgage; he caused all the debts to be paid in full; he gave his son a hundred pounds to start him, and sent him orders to leave the country. This he did, and the name of Harold was mentioned no more. Meantime, at four per cent., the mortgage of £12,000 meant nearly £500 a year in interest. The estate was nominally worth £3000 a year. A sixth part, therefore, was lost. Harold disappeared, and we heard nothing more of him. Now all this happened in the year of grace 1800.

Suppose, now, that in the year 1891 half the farms lost their tenants and could not be let at any rent at all; suppose that in 1892 more farms became vacant; suppose that in 1894 there was not, on the whole estate, one single farm let; that the whole of this once noble estate was fast relapsing into a primitive condition of waste land and had become

absolutely unproductive.

This was exactly the case. Its owner still kept his broad lands, but he could no longer obtain any rent from them, or produce anything except the blackberries in the hedge. He had, therefore, no longer any income. And there was still the interest on the mortgage to be paid.

And the six months' notice had been given, and there would have to be a sale of the whole estate.

It was too big a thing for the help of cousins and private friends. No one can expect friends to advance £12,000 on the security of a worthless estate.

So that here was an old man of sixty-five, who, with his wife of fifty and his daughter of twenty-one, would be turned out into the world, penniless: deprived of everything; not only of everything that makes life happy, but of everything that

makes life possible: forced to work—happy if he could find work—while the rest of his contem-

poraries were taking their pensions.

And he remained perfectly calm and perfectly happy. His spirit Friends, he said, were going to see him through. The White Lady, the voice of one who had been a Bishop, the spirit of the former General, the Friends of the unseen world—or the not very often seen world—were bound to see him through.

"My dear Tom," said my Mother-in-law Elect gently—she also believed; could she do otherwise? —"whatever They promise to do They always do. It appears that They have promised." She believed, you see, because her husband believed. It

is woman's way and woman's reason.

As for my mistress, she laughed, but not with real disbelief. "Tom," she said, "if the spirits whom you irreverently call Banshees and Wandering Lights and Sheeted Spectres and Dame Blanches and Whispering Ones and Groaning Ones can help us, they will. You know what I think of them, for they are always with us, talking to my father in the library. I don't care so long as I don't see them. Let us wait awhile. Since there is no help in man, let us look for help in my father's unseen Friends."

I could only groan, and cudgel my brains in vain for some way of help. It is a most dismal thing to see destitution coming upon the people you love,

and to be powerless—perfectly powerless.

Love powerless has never yet been depicted. Love triumphant, often enough; Love victorious; Love mischievous; Love tricky; Love persuasive; Love treacherous, we all know. The poets and the painters have presented Love in every other

guise and disguise: Love powerless has never yet been depicted. In our case Love stood by looking on powerless—wringing his helpless hands, because he could do nothing. That is to say, he thought he could do nothing. But you shall see. So far, at least, it seemed as if I could not help at all. We were engaged, it is true, but I was only just called; I had little interest among solicitors; I was not particularly eager about my profession; I would much rather have taken one of those farms; and I had a slender patrimony by which to escape starvation. Therefore, the prospect was gloomy indeed. And of help, or relief, none of us except the old man could see any hope from any quarter whatever.

"I have my Friends," the Father-in-law Elect repeated. I did not mind hearing over and over again, that he had his Friends. But I confess that it was creepy when he smiled and bowed to invisible objects, as if the room had been full of his Friends. It requires practice, in such a case, to avoid turning sharp round in your chair in order to look behind it. Of course I never saw anything. Moreover, when you get it into your head that the room is full of Beings, one moves about with precaution in order not to tread on their toes. As for marching straight through them, of course that is inevitable.

"My Friends," he said again. "There need be no anxiety, Tom. They will see us through. A

little faith—only a little faith."

His wife murmured and crooned; she had the voice of a turtle dove; she also shed a tear—a sacrifice on the altar of Faith. Nelly kissed her father's credulous old head. I have said that she really did believe it. What, then, was the good of

the single grunt which came from the only other person present?

CHAPTER II

THE MIRACLE

THE days went on and nothing happened. For my own part, I heard in my chambers every day from Nelly. Nothing happened. Of course it was absurd, but one does somehow get touched with superstitious beliefs when one lives in the midst of them. I really began to look for the Friends to do something. What they could do, it was impossible even to guess. I thought that if they were to turn the clay of the Essex estate into a Klondyke or a Golconda, that would be a practical solution of the problem; probably this simple yet drastic measure never occurred to the Friends. If you consider, you will perceive that the actual nature of mere existence and its conditions as they understand such things does not necessarily teach these Beings the ideas which man calls "practical," meaning the easy acquisition of money. Already two months out of the six had passed.

Two months. I went down to see if anything had happened. Nothing. I found Nelly anxious. Her father, on the other hand, was sublimely confident. "I tell her," he said, "every day to

have faith—only faith."

"I have faith," she replied with a sigh. "It is

hope that I want, as well."

"It is time," I suggested, "that something should be done."

"Yes," asked Nelly, "what can they do?"

In this conversation her father took no part. He sat at the table with one of his folios before

him, abstracted, lost in meditation.

"A nabob," I suggested. "A long-lost uncle with a liver made of auriferous quartz; a cousin who has kicked up a silver mine; an American millionaire dying just after discovering the relationship; a long-forgotten great-aunt——"

"No, Tom, nothing of that kind can happen to

us."

"What should you say, then, to a Miracle?"

"Now you talk sense," she replied. "Let us have a Miracle, by all means. Nothing short of a Miracle will save us."

"If you were to name a few, perhaps---" I

looked about the room.

"My Friends," murmured the old man.

"Suppose thirty or forty thousand pounds in bank-notes were to come fluttering down from the ceiling." We looked up involuntarily as half expecting to see them. But there was no

response.

"We forget," I said, "that your Father's friends are not paper-makers. And if they did make the bank-notes they would become forgers; and since all existing bank-notes belong to private individuals, they could not give them to you without taking them from their owners. Let us not suggest immoral methods, Nelly."

"Then," said the dear girl, equal to the occasion, "let us have bags of golden sovereigns dumped

down upon the table before our eyes."

Again no response.

"Sovereigns must be coined. Your father's Friends have no mints—existing sovereigns have

their owners. The same objection, observe, as in the case of bank-notes. Again, we must not invite illegal methods."

"Well, then, what can they do for us?"

"It is what I have been asking myself, ever so long."

"Faith," murmured the old man.

"They might," said Nelly, "miraculously soften

the heart of the mortgagor."

"You mean the mortgagee. But he would want his interest, and where is that to come from? Also, you cannot live without an income, and where is that to come from?"

"My Friends," murmured her father.

"Tenants might be induced to come. There cannot be any objection to that kind of miracle. Come, Tom, don't throw cold water on everything.

You don't know who may be listening."

"Alas! Tenants would only be induced to present themselves by false and one-sided representations. Would you suggest this method to the worker of Miracles? If they came they would only lose their money and presently become bankrupt. Would you prosper for a brief season by the ruin of others?"

"Oh, you will allow nothing. Could we have a

miraculous rise in the price of corn?"

"Perhaps. The harvest might fail simultaneously in India and in America, so that our own grain would fetch great prices. Millions would then be starved to death. It seems hardly worth while to bring this misery upon the world in order to restore one family to opulence, does it?"

I have narrated this little trifling talk just as it took place, because while we were still carrying it on in this vein, half serious, half in jest, the thing happened which caused this little story to be written.

Nelly has always insisted that the thing was a Miracle. For my own part, I admit that it was a coincidence—even a very remarkable coincidence. Why, then? Every coincidence is remarkable. Every hand at whist is remarkable: one hand is no more remarkable than another: what people think the rarest hand possible is quite as likely to occur as any other. That is the way to look at a coincidence. We were talking of what might happen—this, or that, or something else—when lo! a thing did happen.

Nelly, I say, insists that it was a Miracle. Well,

call it a Miracle if you like.

What is the essence of a Miracle? It is an unexpected, improbable, even impossible, event which occurs at such an opportune moment as to avert a great danger or to bring about a great benefit. Everybody knows people who will tell you that "nothing short of a miracle" prevented this or that. Sailors are always getting miracles. The ship is wrecked. One man gets washed ashore—" Miracle, my masters!" So it is. Look at the recent Miracles worked for all the world to see. There was first the Miracle of the man who thought to blow up London Bridge and was himself blown into fragments while the bridge escaped. "Miracle, my masters!" There was the man who thought to blow up Greenwich Observatory, Providence interfered with the root of a tree, which tripped him up, and blew him up, and his remains were presently swept up. "Miracle, again!" There was the Miracle of the man who intended to blow up a whole congregation of innocent ladies and children in a church. Providence banged a door against him and

the watercarts had to wash away the tiny fragments of him. "Miracle again, my masters!"

About our Miracle, however.

At this moment, I say, while we were talking in this way, the post arrived. It brought one letter only, a nasty-looking letter in a big envelope. I recognised the outward signs or garb of my own profession—the lower branch.

Nelly gave it to her father. "I don't want to read it, my dear," he said, pushing it from him. "It is only some reminder about the mortgage. I

have left it all to my Friends."

"Someone must read it," said Nelly. "Do you

read it, Tom. It may want attention."

"Probably it does if it comes from a solicitor."

I opened the envelope, and read the letter. I looked round me. I gasped. I read the letter again.

"Good gracious, Tom!" Nelly cried. "What

is it?"

"My Friends," repeated their historian.

"I believe it is. Nelly, it's—it's—it's your Miracle! Oh, Lord!" I set down these words just as they were uttered, because I confess that the suddenness of the thing, the wonderful nature of the coincidence, staggered me. At first it did seem to be actually the very Miracle we had been expecting. Afterwards, when I considered—but you shall judge for yourselves.

"My Miracle, Tom?" asked Nelly.

"No doubt—a Miracle," said her father. "Of course, I knew it was coming. But read the letter, Tom."

The letter was from a very respectable firm of

London solicitors:—

"SIR,-We have the honour to inform you that

our client—the late Colonel Henry Cecil Falcon, formerly of the First Royal Rutlands—died on Sunday last, at his residence at 185 Pembridge Crescent. By a will dated two years ago, he has bequeathed the whole of his property absolutely to your son, Mr. Harold Mortimer Falcon, as the future head of the family of which he was a member, though only a distant cousin of yourself—"

"A Miracle, indeed!" cried Nelly.

"My poor Harold!" sighed his mother.

"You now learn," said the friend of the unseen ones, "what my Friends can do. Go on, Tom."

"We have not the address of Mr. Harold Falcon. Perhaps you will kindly place him in communication with us. We have reason to believe that the personalty—there is no real property—will be sworn under £95,000."

That was all.

Then a sudden chill fell upon us. We looked at each other. The old man leaned his head upon his hand guiltily. The mother put her handker-

chief to her eyes. Nelly sobbed.

The money was not given to the father, but to the son. Strange perversity of fortune! To the son! And the son was wandering in some unknown part of the world. And if the son got that money he would lose no time—this we did not say, but we knew it—in gambling it all away. I say we looked at each other with dismay.

"Sir," I said, "your Friends have made a pretty

botch of it."

At this moment I was seized with a shivering; so was Nelly. It was just as if the air of the room had become suddenly cold. Another Miracle, Nelly afterwards suggested. Well, it couldn't be a worse attempt than the first.

"We are no further forward," I said. "We can't touch this money till we know where Harold is—whether he is alive or dead. This windfall does

not help us in the least."

"Oh!" Nelly groaned. "And I had hoped so much!"

It did seem a dead waste of a Miracle. And only a few months more and the mortgage would be foreclosed.

The Father-in-law Elect was, however, equal to the situation. He was troubled at first, because the mention of his son's name filled him with sadness. He did not lose faith in his Friends—not for a moment. He lifted his head and looked

round with a pleasant smile.

"Thanks," he said. "Thanks to all. I take this first step very kindly. You would restore the family through the act and deed of the boy who did the mischief. No? As you please. What you do will be the best—best for all." Then he turned to us. "You have obtained your Miracle, Nelly. Henceforth I beg that I may not be disturbed or worried any more about this business. I have resigned all responsibility. I shall go on now, undisturbed, with my work." Again he laid his hands upon the folios—"I leave the rest to Them."

In the evening I talked over the situation with Nelly. Harold had made no sign at all since his departure. He went off, indeed, loaded with so much material for self-reproach, that one hardly expected to hear from him. We knew nothing about him at all. How could we communicate the news to him? We might advertise—in what papers? If no reply came, how long should we have to wait before we could conclude that he was dead? And how could the legacy be made use of in staving off the threatening sale of the estate?

We talked over the question without arriving at any solution. We might advertise—would Harold see the advertisement? Was he in any part of the world where advertisements are read? There

seemed no other way.

Now, with the knowledge I had acquired about this young man's habits, it was quite certain to me that there was no hope—not the least hope—that he would come to any good. From what I had learned, he was one of those persons who are wholly possessed with the gambling spirit, so that, while it is in them, they think of nothing but the passion of play and the fierce joy of winning and the agony of losing. Such a passion is worse than the madness of drink, which may be cured by never letting the accursed thing enter the lips. The passion of gambling can never be destroyed; it is incurable; once born in a man it remains with a man. So that I was morally certain—though of this we did not speak—that if he got to know of his good luck, the whole fortune would vanish in an incredibly short space of time. "He will return to us," said his mother, "He will pour this money in our lap, to atone for the past and to provide for the future. If only we could let him know!"

It was resolved to put an advertisement in every leading Colonial paper, and to keep it running.

"Wherever Harold is," I reflected, "he must now be well at the bottom of the ladder; men who get down there generally change their name in the course of the descent. It is not by advertisements that we shall find him."

In the dead of night I awoke with a vivid dream. I saw Harold in a far-off country, receiving the news of this good fortune from some person unknown to me. He heard of his great luck with a sigh: then his eyes flashed; his lips parted; he gasped. Then I saw him go off together with that man. They went to a room where they were alone. And they sat down to gamble. I knew not how long they played, but at the end he laid down his cards with a deep sigh—not a curse—took paper and pen; wrote or signed something; and walked away. He had lost the whole of that fortune at a single sitting, and therefore we were none the better.

This dream was so vivid that it terrified me. I sat up in bed agitated and shaken. Because, you see, nothing was more likely to happen. Only a dream! But it might happen. How to prevent it? He must not be told—he must be brought home. How to bring him home? Then a voice spoke within my brain, saying, "Go and look for him yourself." And then I fell back and went to sleep again.

In the morning I remembered both the dream and the injunction vividly—the one like a picture before my eyes; the other a voice ringing always the same words in my ears. At the end of three days I was fully persuaded that the only thing left was for me to go out and look for him.

What I proposed to do was this. I possessed a small patrimony—quite a modest patrimony—no more, in fact, than some six thousand pounds. I sought the mortgagee and explained the case. He

promised not to foreclose. I undertook that the interest should be paid while I was away. I resolved to devote three years, if necessary, to the search.

"If, Nelly," I said, "at the end of that time we are no nearer, I can but come home again, and we

will begin the world anew-and together."

"Go, Tom," said my father-in-law. "Go forth in perfect confidence. What will happen I know not. It will be unexpected. This seemingly roundabout method, I am quite sure, has been adopted because it will prove the safest in the end. Go in faith. They are working for you. You shake your head? Incredulous youth! What? Do you believe that there is no such thing as gratitude?"

And so, with the approval of "Them" and the fond farewell of my queen and mistress, I started

on the quest.

CHAPTER III

THE QUEST

No one, I am sure, ever started on an errand which seemed at first sight more hopeless. What were the data? First, a young man, three years before, had been packed off to Australia. The solicitor who managed the whole business made exile the condition of paying the debts; there was so much grace left in the gambler that he did desire his debts to be paid; he embarked for Australia with a hundred pounds in his pocket. Nobody had ever heard anything about him since. He had not written a single line; indeed, letters were not expected from him. What were the

probabilities? The young man left the country under a cloud; he had been guilty, not of what is commonly called disgraceful conduct; he was not turned out of his clubs, his friends had not publicly thrown him over, but he had shown himself a madman of a most dangerous kind. If he could keep away from the maddening spirit of play he might do anything; if he succeeded he would certainly write to his people, because he was a young man, in all other respects, sane and of wholesome instincts. If he could not keep clear of the gaming table he would go down; he would keep on going down, then he would not write. Now, as he had not written, what was the inference? Naturally, that he had gone down.

Again, it might be considered that gamblers, like drunkards, never reform; once a gambler,

always a gambler.

What would he—could he—do to earn his livelihood? He was not a strong man, or an athlete, or fond of a rough life. Therefore, ranches, country life, farming, cowboydom, were all excluded. He had never learned a trade of any kind, and had no aptitude for any kind of craft. Nor did he possess any accomplishment; he was not a musician, a painter, a singer. And he would want always to be within reach of a gambling saloon. He would be always thirsting with a thirst insatiable for the gaming table. All these indications pointed clearly to the city, not to the country. He was somewhere or other in the city.

Again, what would Harold do when he landed? He had some money with him. Probably that would speedily disappear. Then he must work. What would he do? What is that kind of work to which every man turns who is beginning without a

profession—who is unsuccessful with a profession who is broken down, or disgraced, or bankrupt? He tries journalism. It is the first and the last resource; it is the ladder by which the penniless lad climbs to name and fortune; it is the friendly haven which receives the battered wreck; it is the rope by which the fallen raise themselves again. Journalist: in any country, new or old, the profession of journalism is the only one possible for such a man as Harold Falcon; he was a scholar, remember, and a man of taste, with some pretensions to style. What else could he be? Well, if he were driven by want, he might become a clerk in a store; or if he were to develop in the sporting line, he might become a hawk, kite, or professional There was always something gentle about Harold which made me think the latter line unlikely for him. He might take up with some kind of teaching, but a schoolmaster possessed with the demon of gaming is hardly a good example for the rising generation.

I made up my mind that if Harold reformed and kept steady he would be a journalist; if, on the other hand, his demon seized him, I knew that I should find him somewhere among professional

sharpers.

So, you see, the world grew narrow. I should look for him in the towns first, and in the bigger towns where journalists congregate, and professional sharps lurk and lie disguised. There are only half a dozen large towns in Australia—why, I might get the whole business finished and be home again in six months.

"There was a fellow," said the solicitor who talked over the matter with me, "named Dallas—commonly called Dick Dallas, though his name

was Algernon, or Perceval, or something of that kind. He was also called Child Dallas, or Baby Dallas, because he was so big."

"I remember the man at Harrow. He played in the Eleven. He was about three years my

senior."

"Well, that man went out on board the same boat—a second-class passenger—with our friend. I saw him just before the ship started. I think, if I were you, I would look about for him as well as for Harold."

"You think he would be likely to know?"

"They wouldn't stay together long, but Dick would probably know what the other man was doing. It would certainly be easier to find him. Very big men can't hide themselves. He had the reputation of being a good sort, I remember. You must have heard about him."

I had not heard—partly because the fame of a West End plunger does not generally reach undergraduate circles, partly because I had few friends who belonged to the Gilded Youth. However, the case made some little noise at the time in certain circles. It was not in the least like Harold's case. Child Dallas was not a gambler, though there was a good deal of play connected with his brief career. He was simply another Prodigal Son, with variations—the variations, in fact, which make up the fresh interest in every new version of that story.

In brief, the young gentleman came up to town, his university career unfinished, with a moderate fortune. Considering the present low rate of interest it would have given him quite a moderate income. He took the principal, not the interest, into Fairy Land, and scattered it around with lavish hands. The country is full of harpies and

kites, disguised as gentlemen of honour and ladies of constancy. Very soon the whole of the moderate fortune was gone. Then Dick came out rubbing his eyes, and only half awake, to realise what husks are like.

What becomes of the fairies in that country, how long they last, what they do when they have to go, no one knows; the country lacks its novelist. While they do last, champagne runs for them as the stream flows down the channel; flowers of all kinds blossom for them in lovely meadows; there is dancing and feasting, with all the joys that this plain world can offer. The prodigal sons come and go every year; through how many Prodigal Sons the Fairies last is uncertain; they go, however, in their turn, and what becomes of them nobody knows—any more than they know what becomes of the Prodigal Son himself, because the return and the feast do not belong to all these children of mirth and joy. Dick, as he afterwards told me, enjoyed Fairy Land very much; and, though it ruined him, I verily believe that he looks back to the country with regret, not so much that it cost him his fortune, as that his stay there was Such was the unrepentant nature of the man.

Armed, however, with this knowledge and these deductions or probabilities, I went on board, and made my voyage to Australia. It seemed to me perfectly simple. There are but a few centres of life in Australia—only half a dozen places where such a man as Harold—not a reporter, or a penny a liner, but a scholarly writer, a lawyer, a man of wide reading—could find employment. If he succeeded it would be as a journalist on the best papers. If he failed—that is, if the demon of

play found him out—why, then, indeed, he might be anything. A young fellow standing by himself, if he does not get on, may sink very low down indeed; there is no depth to which he may not sink. If you want to learn how far down a man may sink, you have only to look in at a Salvation

Army Shelter any night.

I thought I should find my man without the least difficulty. I landed at Western Australia; I passed on to Adelaide; thence to Melbourne; to Sydney; to Brisbane; I advertised; I went to police offices; I inquired at newspaper offices. No one knew anything about any Harold Falcon. When I mentioned the reason why he had left his country it was ominous that the police immediately jumped to the conclusion that he had become a cardsharper, of whom, it appeared, there were many in the country. It was useless to point out that the antecedents forbade such a supposition. It was agreed that a man, when he had lost his money, must begin to win somebody else's money or starve; and in order to do this he must join some gang or company of adventurers. For instance, there was a certain Colonel of whom I constantly heard, he was the chief of such a company; the police knew who belonged to it. they were constantly making discoveries about him, and he was constantly moving on, for very good reasons. But there was no one with him who at all resembled Harold.

"There's one fellow with fair hair," a detective told me, "who goes about with the Colonel whereever he goes. I can't make him out. Seems to be soft in his intellects. They laugh at him, and win his money whenever he's got any. He never leaves them. I thought he was a bonnet once, but I don't think so any longer. His name is Harry Camber. He's got a slash across the face."

Up to this point I had no reason for connecting Harold with this fellow called the Colonel, and I

thought nothing of this Harry Camber.

Now, at first I simply forgot to inquire about the man Dallas. Nor till I had searched through all these cities did I remember his name. When at last I thought about the man and his story, and made inquiry after him, I was so fortunate as to find him in the very place—namely, in Adelaide. This discovery proved, as you shall hear, the means of finding our man.

A man named Dallas? Was it a big man, over six feet? Then I might hear of him, or find him, in a certain quarter, whither I went in search of him. Everybody knew him, and there was not the

least difficulty in getting hold of him.

I found him, in fact, sitting in the shade outside a wooden shanty, his back against the wall, his long legs stretched out, his head sunk down into his huge beard; sound asleep. Ten o'clock in the morning is not the usual time for a working man to sleep. However, there he was. I looked at him, and wondered at the noble proportions of the man. He was not only big, but he had a good honest face, and a full-blown beard. He wore a flannel shirt rolled up in the arms and open at the neck; his long legs were stretched out and crossed; a mongrel dog lay asleep beside him. One may explain at once, to avert the danger of prejudice, that Dick was justified in sleeping at this hour because his occupation as night watchman in a merchant's warehouse did not allow him to sleep during the canonical hours. Also-which was an additional reason—the air was warm with the Australian warmth: a warmth that fills one's bones, a warmth which is not intelligible in this land of fog and mist and cloud—plagued with east wind; chilled with north wind; drenched with west wind. He looked the last man in the world to have been a plunger.

My footstep disturbed him. He lifted his head,

opened his eyes, and gazed at me.

"I shouldn't have known you, Dick! Dallas," I said. "When I did know you I was afraid to call you Dick. For I was a youngster and you were in the Harrow Eleven then. You don't remember me? My name was Langley. How are you, Dick?"

He rose slowly—'twas a great mountain of a man; he took my proffered hand. "I daresay," he replied. "But I don't remember you. However, what have you found me out for?"

"I have come out in search of a man you know—you came out on board the same ship—one

Harold Falcon."

"Ay. . . . Ay. . . . What do you want Falcon

"There is some money waiting for him. Do you know the story—the reason why he came out?" There was something in the look of this man that made me trust him at once, and entirely.

"He lost a heap of money and his father paid

it."

"Yes, and now things have gone bad with his father; the farms are unlet; there are no rents. I want to make Harold pay back the money which was advanced by his father."

"Humph! Is Harold a friend of yours?"

"My father was vicar of the parish. I am engaged to his sister."

"Well, you know, to speak quite plainly-"

"If you please, quite plainly."

"He's a devil. When play is about, he's a devil. When there's no play he drivels——"

"What?"

"He drivels. He's grown childish. Man! I don't understand it. I never saw such a case before. Drink makes a man silly sometimes—but he doesn't drink."

"Well-where is he?"

"I don't know."

"Well, tell me all you do know."

He sat down again on the bench, and began to talk.

"When I first knew him—on the voyage—he was pretty miserable. Used to groan a good bit at nights—used to curse himself and his luck. Swore off cards; wouldn't look at a pack. When he landed, he made straight for the newspaper office, and got put on. Showed 'em who he was, I suppose. Well, it wasn't quite like writing for *The Times*, but he did pretty well. Then the Colonel came along."

"What Colonel?" I asked.

"There is but one Colonel. He's got no other name. He's a sportsman, and he generally has a few friends with him; they go about the country snaring the juggins and clearing out the sportsmen. Nobody ever found the Colonel out—but he always wins. So they fight shy, and the Colonel moves on. Yes," he added thoughtfully, "moves on. How the Colonel got to know Harold is more than I can tell you. He made him play, however, and he won his money; then Harold began all over again, poor devil! When he got his week's pay, he would go off to the Colonel with it; they

generally allowed him a reasonable run for his money. One night, however, there was a row royal. I cannot say what it was about. In the morning your man was had up before the Beak, his face slashed right across by somebody's knife. They let him go, but the thing was a scandal, and he lost his post on the paper."

"Oh! I knew he would begin on a paper, and I

thought-"

"The next I heard was that he had joined the Colonel and his gang. I don't think he's one of them exactly, but he goes about with them. He does odd jobs and gets a few dollars, and then loses them to the Colonel. It's a pleasant termination to the career of a young English gentleman, isn't it? My own case isn't exactly the smiles of Fortune; but as to Harold—"

"Going about with the Colonel. You say that

he has not turned cardshaper?"

"He isn't clever enough. No. Perhaps he may bring in flats, but I don't know. So long as he can get his little gamble he cares nothing what he has to do for that privilege. He's changed his name, too. They call him Harry Camber——"

"What? Is he Harry Camber? Why, they

told me about Harry Camber."

"Yes—and he's changed his face. You can change your face in a great variety of ways; you may cut off a beard or you may grow a beard, you may put a patch over one eye, you may wear a slouched hat, you may muffle your throat and chin, you may wear a wig, but the best way of all—the most certain—is to get a deep wound slashed right across your face. I haven't seen him since he got that order of merit, but I can imagine that his own mother wouldn't know him."

"Oh!" I replied thoughtfully, for I could not imagine myself informing Mr. Harry Camber of the change in his fortunes.

"As for being a cardsharper," Dick continued, "he could not possibly do it. If you saw him

play you'd understand that much, easily."

"Why?"

"Because he can't keep his head. Goes mad over the game. He loses himself. There isn't a schoolboy who couldn't clear him out. No. Harold may be a bonnet, but he can't be a sharp. A bonnet he may be. But look for the Colonel."

So we talked over the business all that day, and the next day, and the day after; and we agreed that, above all things, I must no longer advertise. Because, if Harold once suspected the money, no one could guess what mischief he might do with it. Once more, armed with this knowledge, I put the case into the hands of the police. Australia is a big country, but the police are all over it; and the existence of a man named Harry Camber, with a scar across his face, and a weakness in the direction of the gambling table, would, they told me, be easily ascertained if he was anywhere on the Australasian Continent.

This done, I sat down to wait, enjoying the conversation and the society of Dick Dallas, who was a gentleman all day with me—talking of old days, we tacitly agreed to say nothing of the Plunge—and all night was a watchman in a store.

The time went on. Nothing could be heard of our man. From Western Australia, from Tasmania, from Victoria, from New South Wales, from Queensland the replies came in. No such person was known anywhere.

"The police," said Dick, "don't know everybody.

They know a good deal, but it is quite possible that they have missed our man. I don't believe he is dead. The man you want to die never does die. He is about and alive somewhere."

He pulled at his pipe reflectively for a bit. "If I were you, Langley, I'd go the round of the places where you can get a little gamble of the cheaper kind. Not the swell clubs, you know, but the

drinking places."

"I don't know where they are." And then an inspiration came to me. "Dick," I said, "come with me. Help me to look for him. Come with me. I'll foot the bills, and we'll agree upon—whatever you like to call it."

"Meaning what you say?" His broad face lit up. "There's nothing I'd like better. Here's my hand upon it. I'd like nothing better. And, I say, Langley, if we could only find the Colonel!"

And then began the second part of my "Voyages and Travels in search of a Gambler's Bonnet." I pass over this part as I passed over the first. Suffice it to say that more than a year was spent in hunting down the Colonel. We traced him right through Australia; he practised generally in the big places, but he was sometimes heard of in the smaller towns. Occasionally we heard of the man with a scar across his face, but not often. "Where the Colonel is," said Dick, "there will Harold be as well." Always we were a month, two months, or three months behind them. We searched in queer places with the help of a policeman; we sailed among the islands of the Pacific in search of him. Sometimes, in the dead of night, the panorama of the play unfolds itself. and I seem to have travelled over the whole round globe. In that wandering I grew as weary as

Ulysses himself; as weary as the Wandering Jew: and always before us was the Colonel, a little while before us, and we never caught him up. "Let us give it up," I said a dozen times. But Dick would

not hear of any giving up.

I heard from time to time from the people in Essex. The old man was perfectly settled in his belief; there was some delay, he admitted, but his Friends would not break their promise. "I wish, dear Tom," said Nelly, "that I had so strong a faith. As the time goes on and nothing is done, my heart sinks lower and lower. And every day I say to myself, 'He might arrive this very day, bringing Harold home with him—Harold in his right mind—Harold as he used to be, before.'" Poor Nelly! The Harold I might have brought home was transformed, he was Harry Camber, he had got a slash across his face, and he was a confederate—or a silly dupe—in a gang of sharpers.

It was in San Francisco—the rest of the world was exhausted—and it was two years and a half since the beginning of the quest; the hunting of a man over the whole world; this vain and fruitless quest, this idle beating of the air, this long inquiry and questioning which led to nothing.

Dick went out on a round among the places where he was likely to meet with sportsmen. I stayed at the hotel, being sick and sad at heart. Nothing done, and the time drawing near, and then—then—what was to be done then? Half my modest fortune gone, and for no good.

So in melancholy mood I sat alone.

It was midnight when Dick came home. He danced up the stairs; he threw up his hands with

joy; he shouted, "Luck at last, old man! Luck at last!"

I sprang to my feet. "You have found him?"
"No, I haven't. We must go on to Chicago to-morrow. I've found the Colonel. He's there. And wherever he is, Harold won't be far off."

CHAPTER IV

THE LAKE BOAT

FROM San Francisco to Chicago is a long journey except to travellers like myself and the Wandering Jew-with whom a thousand miles is nothing; only a small fraction—a twenty-fourth—of the world's circumference. Travelling, I had long discovered, in order to preserve its delights, must be limited and occasional. A bagman, for instance, is said to have no feeling for the picturesque: and the Wandering Jew, Ahasuerus, has long since lost any joy in scenery; ruined castles pall upon him; cathedrals cease to impress him. For my own part, I have travelled more than most men: I have travelled incessantly for two years and a half; and I declare that I do not desire to travel any more at all. Give me a salmon stream or the golf links and let me rest. Dick Dallas, who has had much the same experience, acknowledges a similar frame of mind. Domestic joys, he says, and a garden, are now his dream.

We performed that journey, the last journey but one, without enthusiasm, and without curiosity as to the country through which we passed. Rest was within sight of us, though this we knew not when the train rolled into Chicago. It was in July, and on a day of terrific heat, the thermometer over ninety all day and over eighty all night. The city was crammed full of people, for it was the year of the Great Exhibition, and in addition to the customary millions there were hundreds of thousands coming and going. The crowded cars ran clinking up and down the street; there were four-in-hand coaches, horn and all, complete, setting off for the Exhibition; there were open wagonettes, omnibuses, chars à banc, bound on the same journey; there were country people from the Far West strolling about on the shady side; and in the business part of the city, where huge blocks of twelve storeys high were raised for offices, clerks rushed about, their handkerchiefs stuffed into their necks to prevent their collars becoming sodden rags. It was a year of pleasure, but business must go on still.

We looked about us and marked the rush and whirl of the place; a rush and whirl that never ceases, and knows no diminution when the sun is hottest or the wind is coldest. It is a tenacious and a resolute race that can build up and maintain the great cities of the Lakes in the teeth of extremes such as would overcome the mild inhabitant of Europe. So resolute is the race that they seize on all comers, and impart to them the same eagerness, the same alertness, the same resolution. The German, slow and hesitating, puts on the American directness; the Hungarian becomes a smart man of business; the Russian ceases to dream; even the soft and gentle man of Devon gets him a new mind when he finds himself in the streets of Chicago.

They rushed past us as if there was not a moment to be lost, even in that fiery forenoon; they ran into one office and out of another; they

swarmed into the lifts; they carried with them everywhere the atmosphere of press and haste. I have seen many centres of life, and of work and of business, but I have never seen anything like the eager rush, the drive of life, that I saw that morning in the streets of Chicago. To a mere spectator it seemed maddening. I suppose that when one is launched upon the stream one hardly notices the swiftness of the current or the rapidity with which one is hurried on.

It is a quiet crowd; you do not hear them talk; you will hear more of the human voice in five minutes on the pavement of West Chepe than in any street of Chicago. It is also a grave crowd. The young men do not laugh; the elders have their faces set with seriousness. What am I doing? Laying down a general statement after half an hour of observation. Very likely I am all wrong: the young men are, perhaps, full of mirth and fun and lively sallies; the elders, perhaps, poke each other in the ribs; they sing, perhaps, as they go along, and the atmosphere is a blessed calm sacred to the cultivation of quiet and of leisure. If, however, first impressions are true impressions, then it seemed as if on every man's face was stamped more plainly than can be found elsewhere the truth that every man is for himself in this lonely world. When some stopped to exchange a few words it seemed that it was not in English, but in one of the many tongues which are found in the city of Chicago.

I said that I was no longer curious. That is true; yet at the sight of this immense city, so young, so huge, so full of busy and active life, one could not choose but to be deeply moved. Here is another Babylon, placed, like Babylon, at the meeting of many ways, destined to become a greater by far

than that ancient city, absorbing all comers; converting the strangest arrivals into Anglo-Saxons, even as we other Anglo-Saxons have absorbed and converted successively Dane and Norman, Frenchman, Palatine, and Fleming.

"We did not come here, old man," said Dick presently, "to take stock of the city, but to find

our man."

"Well, then, let us go and look for him. What

if he isn't here?"

"Where the Colonel is, there we shall find Harry Camber. Now, the Colonel's address is——." He looked it up in his pocket-book. "Tom, you'd better let me see the Colonel first. I remember him. If I lose a few dollars he'll very likely tell me, without suspicion, where I can lay my hand on Harold. If he gets suspicious we may have trouble."

"Why should he be suspicious?"

"Because, if there's money coming to Harry Camber, the Colonel will take great care of him; he'll nurse him and coddle him, you see, till he's got all that money."

"You mean that he'll rob Harold?"

"Not at all. He'll play with Harold. There's no need to rob that poor innocent; a child could beat him at any game you please. Harold wants to play. That's all."

"Let me go with you, Dick. I should like to

see this Colonel."

He looked doubtful. "Well," he said, "it's just as you like." A concession which might have

proved fatal, as you shall hear.

The address was that of a dive or basement saloon—as a man might offer his club as an address. The saloon was in a very low part of

the city, a delectable spot in a delectable street; for, indeed, the slums of Chicago, considering the age of the city, are most creditable for their drink, their gambling, their stench, and their iniquities. Outside, the air was like an oven for heat, but it was a dry heat; round the mouth of this cave there lingered a kind of mist which continually ascended from below. It was charged with the malodorous breath of bad tobacco, bad whisky, and bad humans. We descended the steps and entered the precious place. Within there were a few tables scattered about, and three or four men playing cards, even so early in the morning. They looked up curiously, and then continued

their game.

Leaning against the counter, a cigar between his lips, was a man whom I spotted at once as the Colonel. There is a certain stamp upon the face of the sporting man in every branch of the profession which is catholic, and not to be effaced. You may meet with it in the billiard-rooms, in card-rooms, on race-courses, and at the Empire Theatre (in evening dress). The Colonel was unmistakably stamped with that seal. His face made no pretence. Nothing of the hypocrite about the Colonel's face. It boldly said, "I belong to the devil, as perhaps you can see by the look of me. Did you ever before see 'villain' writ more large and plain?" In figure he was a thin, slight man, dressed rather better than the other men in the place. He wore a collar, for instance. Looking at him, one thought of bowie knives and revolvers. Why, I cannot say; for during the whole of my travels, with a really unique experience of dens and gamblers, I never once saw a knife drawn or a shot fired.

Dick accosted him boldly, holding out his hand. "Colonel," he said, "how are you? I'm afraid you don't remember me. We had a game or two in Adelaide, two years ago."

"Well, sir," the Colonel replied, "that may be.

But yet, I don't somehow remember-"

"There was another man with me at the time—man named Harry Camber. There was a row over the cards, and Harry got a cut over the face. Do you remember that row?"

"Ay—ay. Well, I do seem to remember that. And what do you want with me? What have

you come here for?"

"Well, Colonel, I want to find my old friend."

"Where'd you come from last?"

"They told me I should find you here."

"Who told you?"

"They told me at San Francisco."

"Oh!" The Colonel looked suspicious. "They told you at 'Frisco that I was to be found here.

And what might you want me for?"

"I blundered the whole job," said Dick afterwards. "I ought to have said that I was in Chicago looking round, and that I saw him, and looked in for the pleasure of meeting him. It was a stupid business, though we got out of it; a discreditably stupid business."

"Have a drink, Colonel?" he replied.

The Colonel took a drink. "Well, sir?" he asked.

"I want to find my old chum Harry Camber. Will you tell me where he is?"

Dick looked round the room. There was no

Harry Camber among them.

"If you give me a message," said the Colonel, "I might manage to let him have it."

"Tell him," I said, putting in a mischievous oar,

"that his friends want him."

"Oh! His friends want him, do they? His friends? Now, that's strange. His friends in England? That's stranger still."

The Colonel was no hypocrite, as I have said.

Nor did he attempt to conceal his suspicion.

"They want him."

"They loved him so much that they shoved him out of the country with a hundred pounds in his pocket. What has he done since that they should want him back?"

"Well-they do want him."

"If you've got anything to give him I will send it. Won't that do, stranger?"

"Not quite, Colonel. His friends want him. I

must identify him."

"Oh!" The Colonel looked thoughtful. "Harry Camber is a man of whom his friends have suddenly become proud and fond. They are so fond of him that they send one man all the way from London, and another all the way from 'Frisco. And they want him identified. What does that mean? Identified. What do you identify a man for, anyway?"

I made no reply.

"It means money. That's what it means. Well, gentlemen, no one will grudge Harry Camber a slice of good luck. Only, you see, he has friends here who love him as much as his friends at home, and for much the same reason, too." He smiled. "Well, I see no reason why you should not go and identify the man. You can then tell him what the money is, and where it is."

"Quite so, Colonel. Quite so," said Dick cheerily. For my own part I was beginning to see rocks ahead.

"When we know all the particulars we will put a lawyer on the job, and transfer that money from Great Britain to Chicago. Because, there's one thing you'll have to remember. His friends here love that young man so, that they won't never let him go out of their sight. Never."

"Very good, Colonel. Very good," Dick replied

for both of us.

"And now we've had that little explanation, I don't mind letting you know where to look for him. He goes on board the boats that ply between the quay and the World's Fair. There's one that starts at six. It's the favourite boat because it comes in for the lighting of the White City. He'll go by that boat this evening, for certain. If you know Harry by sight, you'll find him there. He carries on a useful trade, so's not to be a burden on his American friends."

"Thank you, Colonel," said Dick. "I always said you were a straight man. Have another

drink."

"You'll find me, gentlemen, as straight as a line—especially where the interests of a friend are concerned. And as for Harry Camber, whether the money is much or little, I will see that he is protected. He has a guileless nature, gentlemen, in which he greatly resembles me." Dick grinned from ear to ear, though the Colonel was perfectly grave. "You can rely upon me, gentlemen, to look after your old chum."

"Thanks, Colonel," said Dick, "we will look him

up this evening."

"All the way from 'Frisco! And all the way from London! Gentlemen, I shall congratulate Harry. This means a big pile."

We came away feeling rather small. "There

may be trouble ahead," said Dick. "They won't let Harry out of their sight, that's quite clear; if we take him home with us, the Colonel will come too.

We are a pair of fools, Tom."

What we had to do was to get Harry out of Chicago without the Colonel's knowledge. The only chance of doing so was to take him off that very evening. There was a train for New York starting at eight in the evening. The boat arrived at the Exhibition about seven; there were trains every five minutes from the Exhibition to the City. We went back to the hotel; after lunch packed up; carried our luggage to the station, and took three tickets for New York, so as to be in readiness.

During the time of the Exhibition, steamboats—huge floating caravans—left the City at regular intervals for the Great Show, which stood four or five miles east of the City on the shore of the Lake. Crowds of people chose this route, which afforded a view of the White City such as could not be got by land. Rows of chairs were arranged on the upper deck, so that the people could sit down for the contemplation of the wonderful vision of splendour which awaited them. We were late, and had to stand, which mattered nothing.

"See that fellow?" Dick indicated a remarkably Ill-favoured One, standing alone behind the chairs, a man with a perfectly villainous expression of countenance, looking singularly out of place among the pleasure-seekers. "That fellow, Tom, was in the saloon with the Colonel. I remember him. He is sent to watch us. His instructions are—oh! I know—not to let Harold out of his sight. If I am right the Colonel will be on the quay himself, when the boat returns, to meet him

and to take care of his friend. But I don't see

Harold anywhere."

Then the band—there was a band, of course—struck up; I remember they played the "Orphée aux Enfers": the bell rang; the vessel moved from the quay. The people took their chairs and sat down, chatting gaily; the girls, I noticed, did most of the talking and the laughing; it was a holiday company. We walked along the lines of chairs, looking into the men's faces in search of Harold; he was not among them; we might have known that he would not, certainly, be found in any company of merry-makers.

Suddenly Dick caught my arm fiercely, carried away by the marvel. "There's our man! There's Harold! There's an English gentleman, and a scholar, and a lawyer for you! Great Scot! I've seen," he went on, to himself, "many a rummy transformation out in Australia, but hang me if ever I——" his voice died away, rumbling in the

depths of his capacious beard.

Yes, there was Harold. I knew him at once, in spite of that ugly red scar across his face. Tall, thin, light-haired, blue-eyed, he was little changed save for that scar. What was this young gentleman doing among the holiday-makers? He was selling them gum to chew. He carried his wares in a basket hung round his neck by a leather strap. There are many unexpected things in the way of professions; with such a man as Harold one might look for the most unexpected. He was pushing his gum with the volubility of a Cheap Jack and the animation of a salesman in Wentworth Street on a Sunday morning.

"This is the gum"—his words commanded confidence—"that brightens the complexion and

paints the lovely cheek with roses. Ladies who chew this gum never lose their beauty or their lovers. Children cry for it. Girls who chew this gum never lose their temper. Nobody who chews this gum ever wants a dentist. This is the digestive gum. This gum makes the old young and the helpless hearty. Look at it. Look at the colour of it. Look at the beauty of it." And so he walked, slowly winding his way among the chairs, selling his packets right and left. We stood on the other side watching him. And the man who was honoured with the Colonel's confidence watched him carelessly, but not speaking to him.

He left the upper deck and went below. We followed, and looked in while he began again the same patter: "This is the gum that makes the old young and the helpless hearty. Look at the

colour of it. Look at the beauty of it."

There were fewer passengers on the main deck. He quickly worked through them, and then, taking off the straps, he sat down on the other side of the steps and began to count his money.

Apparently he found less than he anticipated, for all the sprightliness went out of him. He withered. He looked out across the lake with

despondency on his face.

"He counts so much to buy more gum," said Dick, watching him, "so much for his board, and so much to play with. And he hasn't got enough for the smallest gamble. That's why he looks concentrated misery."

I laid my hand upon Harold's shoulder.
"Harold," I said, "do you remember me?"

He turned quickly and flushed. So much of grace was left in him that he was ashamed. "Why," he said, "you are Tom Langley, son of

our old vicar. You are come to see the World's Fair?"

"No. I am come to find you. And now I have found you."

"I am dead, quite dead. I promised to be dead

three years ago. I've kept my promise."

"We shall see about that. Meantime, I have a great many things to tell you. When you have heard them all you may be as dead as you please."

"Tell away, then."

"I can't, here. There are listeners about; you have too many friends, Harold. You must come away with me for a few days. Perhaps you will go home with me. Don't shake your head. If you won't come with me you will not learn what I have to tell you."

"Is—is it—money, Tom?" he whispered. I nodded my head. "Money!" his face became quite beautiful with the sudden joy that lit it up. "Money! Oh! I want money so very, very badly, Tom. I have been so miserable for want of money. Yes, I will go with you—anywhere—

anywhere."

I stayed with him. The sun went down in splendour over the lake. The white buildings of the City Marvellous rose above the low shores, glowing in the sunset glory. As the steamer drew nearer the colour faded out of the sky; the outlines of the buildings grew dim, and then suddenly, line upon line, in myriad lines, in wreaths and curves and arches and circles, the electric lights leaped up, and the City Marvellous sprang out of the darkness with a new magnificence and more splendid loveliness. It was not on exhibitions that my mind was turning at that moment, but if one had been on the way to the gallows, that sight would have

burned itself upon the brain. I can hear again, as I write, the gasp that ran all along those lines of chairs, at the magic of the spectacle. The people were hushed; they were awed; at the vision which suddenly burst upon their gaze.

The steamer touched the quay. I held my man by the hand, and followed the crowd upon the gangway. After us came Dick, and beside him on

the narrow way the friend of the Colonel.

"Make straight for the railway station," said Dick. "It's right in front. Don't wait to look at

anything."

Without looking to the right or the left, I walked straight on, holding Harold by the arm. I have a confused recollection of a vast crowd moving about: of rows of electric lights: of coloured lamps; of music braying outside shows; of cymbals clanging, drums beating, trumpets blaring; along a kind of fair, with pavilions or booths on either side. But we had no time to stay. I am the only person who ever walked through the Chicago Exhibition seeing nothing. We arrived at the railway station and found a train on the point of starting. The Ill-favoured One followed, and got into the same carriage, but without addressing a word to Harold, who seemed not to notice him. I had been in hopes that we might have shaken him off. We had not done so, then. But there was a glow as of sunshine on Dick's face which somehow reassured me.

"There is money coming to you, Harold," I repeated. "But you can't touch it until you know all about it, and I shall not tell you unless you come with me. Do you want the money?"

"Want it! Want it! Oh, man-if I want it!

I am perishing for want of money."

I suspected at the outset, and I have felt quite sure ever since, that the man's brain was touched; he took no interest in anything except play. When he was not playing he was dreaming about play. The reason why he was the creature of the Colonel was simply that the latter let him play every evening, if it was only for an hour. You find men who drink constantly all day long, craving for the stimulus of alcohol, losing their wits, and their will, and their self-respect, in a continued desire for drink; so also men will fall into a similar slough with play. As for the spirit and the sprightliness with which he had hawked his gum, that was assumed. Necessity forced it upon him. Naturally, he was the most gloomy and melancholy of creatures.

"I am going to take you away," I went on. "We shall go to England. Then you will get

your money.

"To England? It will take a long, long time. I should like to have it now . . . here . . . to-

night."

"Why—what would you do with it, if you did get it to-night? You could not do anything with it."

He stared at me with mild astonishment. "Do with it? I should play with it, of course. What else should I do with it?"

"You wouldn't play with the whole of it, would

you?"

"Not play with—? Tom, you understand nothing. The only thing to do with money is to

play with it."

He never, at any time, then or afterwards, asked how much money there was, or where it came from, or anything at all about it. That he would have the material for a good long play was enough for him. He had no other earthly interest.

The train arrived at its terminus. "This chap," Dick nodded in the direction of the Colonel's friend, "doesn't know where we are going. He begins to be rather bothered in his poor head. You shall now see an amusing little game. The New York train starts in ten minutes. You've got the tickets, and the train is over there. You go straight to the cars. I will make as if I am going to take the tickets. He'll follow me, in order to find out where we are going. Then, if I mistake not, he will make an agreeable discovery. If I am prevented by a row or anything, never mind me. Go on without me. Take the first boat that sails. Get across the ocean as fast as you can."

I obeyed, taking Harold with me. He was as unresisting as a lamb. We got into the New York train. The Colonel's man hesitated. He looked after Dick, who was making for the ticket-clerk; he looked into the carriage; he made up his mind that he must take a ticket, and that we could not very well run away with the train. Then he turned and followed Dick.

It now wanted eight minutes for the time of starting. Five minutes passed. There was no Dick. Three minutes. I became anxious. Two minutes. When the train began to move Dick jumped upon the car, and as we rolled out of the station I saw our friend standing with hanging hands and a face of consternation.

"He ran after me," Dick laughed, "to find out where we were going. 'Three New York,' I said. Then I felt in my waistcoat and told the clerk I would return in a minute. 'New York,' he says, taking my place. Then he too felt in his pocket,

and he turned all manner of colours. 'I've had my pocket picked,' he says. 'Dear me,' says I, 'that's embarrassing. Won't you come as far as New York with us?' Then he began to use language."

"Dick, is all fair in war?"

"I rather think," said Dick, "that what happened was this. There was a press of people on the gangway leaving the steamer. There was a bundle of notes sticking out of a pocket. A touch, you know, only a touch, and down went the bundle. Only one man saw it drop, and he perhaps may have kicked it into the lake."

Harold looked up. "Are we going straight to

where the money is?"

"We are, my chum, we are. And the Colonel isn't."

"Who shall I play with, then?" he asked

helplessly.

"You poor thread-paper," said Dick, "won't I do to play with, or Tom? Are you in such a mighty hurry to get rid of it all?"

"Money, the Colonel says, is only made, really, to be played for. He's a great man, the Colonel.

He always wins."

And this was the kind of creature whom I hoped to persuade to an act of justice, and of generosity afterwards.

CHAPTER V

FROM THE QUAY TO THE BAR

ALL night long the train rumbled and thumped its way along the rails. Harold, his hat over

his eyes, appeared to sleep through the whole night. For my own part, I seemed to be awake the whole night. I had a good deal to think about, and some of the small hours were spent in thinking. I had succeeded at last; that was true. The quest of the man was ended; he was captured and brought away. Now that we had him, what advantage would it prove to anyone? The train rumbled on, and the wheels sang a simple song, of which all the words were, "What good will it be?"

Morning came at last. Harold woke up; that is to say, he pushed his hat back and sat silent and motionless. When breakfast was served he went with us to the dining-car; but he seemed to have no desire for food. As we learned afterwards, he had no desire left for any earthly thing except for play. Food and drinks were necessary from time to time; he took them, not caring of which kind they were; for everything else—books, music, conversation—he had entirely lost all interest; he had become a creature who was just a machine for

holding and for playing cards.

As I looked at him, I remembered what he had been: the grave student who seldom smiled, and was, oh! so very superior in my young eyes; the first-class man; the barrister; always a young man rich with promise for the future. One would have said that his career was marked out plain before him. Never was the career of any young man more certain; he would acquire reputation and a great practice; he would certainly take silk early; before fifty he would have a seat on the Bench. Can one desire a career more full of honour, dignity, and consideration? And now? The old soul had gone out of him, and a new and

a much lower soul had taken its place. There was no dignity in his brow; there was no thought in the eye; there was no firmness in the mouth: the whole man was transformed. I declare that as I looked at him, and considered these things, I trembled, because one could not choose but believe that a devil had entered in and held possession. That drink can so ruin and corrupt and degrade a man, can so deprive him of will and of self-respect and of dignity, we know from numberless examples. That the passion for gambling should in like manner be able to change a thinking man into a creature blind and careless to all things in heaven above and on the earth below, except only gambling, I could not understand.

"Harold," I said, "you have not asked after your

people."

"No," he replied. "No. Why should I? They

no longer belong to me."

Then I told him of the disasters which had fallen upon the estate. He expressed no regret

and showed no interest.

"This money of yours," I pointed out, "will come in opportunely to pay off the mortgage caused by your folly, and will leave enough to provide for the old folks and to keep the estate from actually falling into ruin. The thing which remains for you to do is to convey the whole to your father, and then to settle down with your people"—I looked at him, I saw how hopeless it would be to expect him to stay at home, and how undesirable a guest he would be—"or," I added, "return to America and your friends here."

"Give up my money — mine? Pay off debts with it?" he replied in amazement not assumed. "Why, man, what am I running away from my

best friends—my American friends—for, except to get this money? I am going to bring it all back, unless I have a long, long game with it—somewhere—before. The Colonel himself will play with me."

"I have no doubt that he will."

"I can do what I like with my own money. I haven't won much, lately, because I couldn't go on. If you want to win you must be able to go on. Now I shall go on—oh! a long time."

"It is yours, certainly." Then I put the case again, urging as strongly as I could the duty, the necessity, of using the money for retrieving the

family estate.

I might have talked to a brick wall. The man was absolutely and perfectly selfish. No mollusc on a boulder could be more completely selfish. He had no relations; he wanted none: he felt no filial affection: he had forgotten all these things. He wanted nothing but animated creatures who would play with him. I showed him the portrait of his sister; he pushed it aside: I spoke to him about his mother; he showed not the least interest. And then I gave him up.

At ten o'clock in the evening we arrived in New York. A Cunarder was sailing in the morning for Liverpool. We had a suite of rooms after the American fashion at the hotel; we put Harold in the innermost chamber, and told him to go to bed. Then we sat and looked at each other in dismay.

"Dick," I said, "is there any possible way out

of this?"

"If," said Dick slowly, "we can devise nothing, we may as well leave him behind and go home alone."

"That is my conviction, Dick."

"One thing occurs to me, Tom. What this poor lunatic wants is a long game. Give him one and he will be perfectly happy. At present he dreams of going back to Chicago with a bag full of dollars and sitting down with the Colonel."

"Go on." For he stopped.

"He seems to have forgotten the meaning of money, or the value of money. He looks on it as a medium for play. It is the thing which gives excitement to play."

"Well? You've got something up your sleeve,

Dick."

"I have. I propose, Tom, to begin that long game to-morrow; on board the boat; in our cabin."

"I don't understand."

"I will explain more clearly. I propose, on leaving port to-morrow morning, to sit down to play with him. I shall win continually; he will care nothing for that so long as the play goes on. At the end of the voyage I shall have won the whole of the money."

"You will have won . . .?" I hardly understood.

"I pledge myself, in the course of a week, to win the whole of it, whatever the amount. If I clean him out before the end of the voyage I will keep him at play all the same. He shall enjoy his Long Game."

"But—Dick—this is a conspiracy."

"Not a bit. I am a gambler—I sit down to play with another gambler."

"How do you know that you will win?"

He laughed. "Watch the first half-hour," he said. "I've played with Harold before."

"Well — but — again: how will it profit those people in Essex?"

Dick laid his massive hand on my shoulder, nearly breaking it. 'Tom," he said, "that was a nasty one. Do you think, old man, after we've been about all this time together, that I would play such a dirty trick as that? Why, I represent the Family. Fortune will incline her heart in the direction of the Family. I win for you and your friends."

I was silent for a bit. One does not like playing with a man whom you are sure to beat. At the same time, so much was at stake; so important was it to get that money devoted to a proper object, that objections were overborne. I consented. We would fleece the man—there was no other word—out of his money. I would aid and abet, while Dick was to be the active partner.

"Mind," said Dick, "it's to be an all day sederunt and perhaps half the night as well. The man's a glutton; he never wants to leave off play. As for me, I must have five hours' sleep at least, and I must have breakfast and dinner. Believe me, my dear Tom, it's a Christian act to gratify this

diseased brain."

"Well, but, Dick—we've been about a good bit together. I never knew that you could play, or

that you liked play."

"Well, you see, play was part of my little plunge. Had I stuck to écarté and picquet, the plunge would have lasted much longer. Nap, loo, and baccarat, not to speak of poker, were added. I

shall ruin Harold with picquet."

There was no difficulty in securing berths. Dick and Harold were put into one cabin, I had the opposite cabin to myself. We had got a few necessaries for the voyage and a new rig-out for Harold, who looked somewhat less forlorn in decent clothing. We stood on deck watching the arrival of the passengers. At last they were all in; the bell rang for visitors and sayers of farewell to leave the ship, and the screw began to turn.

Then Dick laid his hand on Harold's shoulder. "I know what you're thinking about, old man,"

he said.

Harold looked up. He was not thinking of

anything.

"You are thinking," said Dick, "of the days when you and I used to play picquet in our shanty at Adelaide."

Harold drew a long breath.

"What do you say? A voyage is a tedious job. Let us play picquet all the time."

"All the time?" asked Harold.

"The whole time, man; we'll have a delightful game. It will last from now till we get in. I say,

Harold, we shall just have a glorious game."

"Ah!" The ecstasy of that interjection cannot be transferred to paper. "I've got cards." He produced from his pocket an old pack tied up in an oilskin cover for safety; frayed and fretted by the tooth of Time. He shuffled them with fingers that trembled with eagerness. "Where shall we play?"

"Not in the smoking saloon, with a crowd of fellows about. Let us play in our own cabin. Come along, Harold. I've got some new cards."

I followed them. Dick placed a portmanteau between them for a table. "Now," he said, "it used to be picquet at Adelaide, we'll make it picquet again."

I looked on. The gambler speedily asserted himself in Harold. He recovered his interest in things; he seemed to start into life. He sat with glittering eye and parted lips; he snatched at the cards; his cheeks were pale but for the scar, which

was changed from red to purple.

From the outset I perceived that he had no chance. Dick played a steady, skilful game—I think, a fine game. Harold lost his head at the outset; he converted a game of play into a game of luck and chance.

I left them to their play. They did not show up at lunch. About five o'clock I looked into the cabin; they were still at play. I sent them some tea. At dinner they came in, but only sat out half the meal when Harold dragged his adversary away.

They played all the evening. I went to bed at

eleven; they were playing still.

"We knocked off," said Dick, "at two. That is, I knocked off, for he wanted to go on again. I have promised to begin again at nine."

"Have you made a beginning?"

"Rather. I am already more than ten thousand to the good."

"What does he say to the loss?"

"Nothing. He thinks only of the long game. 'Five more days,' he says."

"Does he know that he has lost so much?"

"I have his I.O.U."

"Suppose that he refuses to recognise that document?"

"He will not refuse. He knows that no one would play with him any more if he did such a

thing."

At nine o'clock they began again. For a few hours there was a wonderful run of luck in favour of Harold. Dick, however, played on steadily, making the best of bad hands, and showing no signs of irritation at his bad luck. Then the luck

turned. Again they played till two or three in the

morning.

"Do you think," said Dick, "that I shall live through the job? I am not quite so well on today. Yesterday I had won ten thousand. This

morning it is only about nine thousand."

All that day they played, and far into the night. Harold thrived under the confinement of the cabin and the excitement of the game. Dick began to look more than a bit white in the cheek and bloodshot in the eye; but he held on.

The morning and the evening were the fifth,

sixth, seventh day.

As for the result of the game, it stood as follows, roughly. The first day gave Dick £10,000; the second lowered that amount by about £1000; the third raised his gain to £17,000; after this it was plain sailing. Dick won hand over hand.

As we crossed the bar of the Mersey on Saturday

evening Dick threw down the cards.

"The voyage is over," he said, "and so—so—so

is the game."

"Over!" Harold groaned, "What a game! What a noble game! Never have I enjoyed such a game."

"You've lost, I suppose you know---"

"I daresay. I always do lose. That's because I haven't the time or the money to go on. Remember what splendid runs of luck I had two or three days ago."

"Well, it's all over. You've got to pay up,

Harold. Players must pay."

"Yes, players must pay. It isn't that, Dick, I don't mind paying. It is that I shall never—never get such a long game again as long as I live."

The light died out of his face. He collapsed

once more, mentally and physically.

We took him to London; we proved his identity; we established his claim. Then we laid before him a deed of assignment by which he conveyed the whole of the property to his father. He merely asked if the introduction of his father's name was right, and signed away his ninety-five thousand pounds, less the duty. Signed it away without a word of regret or of reproach. Indeed, he felt neither.

"There's one thing to remember, Harold," said Dick. "If the Colonel had played that game it would never have lasted so long by three days at least."

I say that he did not regret the loss of the money in the least. He was deeply grateful for the long game, and he had now only one desire, to get back to his friends in Chicago.

We took his passage for him; we sent him down to Liverpool under escort, so to speak, to prevent him from falling into the hands of sportsmen on the way; and we gave him £100 in American notes so that he should start with another game.

It was all in the Exhibition year. I suppose that he went back. I am certain that he went back; and his £100 would last a whole evening with the Colonel. Perhaps he then resumed the vending of gum.

CHAPTER VI

THE SON'S MESSAGE

"OH! It is Tom!"

I arrived without any premonitory letter or telegram to announce my coming. I found the

old place just as I had left it, silent and peaceful amid its gardens and its orchards, though all around the farms were going back to a prehistoric condition.

My queen and mistress was in the flower garden; her father was in the study; a gardener was mowing the lawns, and there were the crowing of cocks and the clucking of hens from the yard; there was a blaze of July roses. The queen of all the roses ran to meet me, and to fall into my arms.

"You have found him?" she asked. "I can

see it in your eyes."

"I found him at last, after a search like the wanderings of Ulysses. How lovely it is to get back!"

"There will be plenty of time to tell me all

about them. First, about Harold."

"I found him at last, in the city of Chicago."

"How is he looking? And what is he doing? And is he—is he, Tom—at all repentant for what he has done?"

"He is looking in good health, except that he has a scar on his face which disfigures him. He is engaged, I have reason to believe, in business—something connected with sugar, I think."

"A clerk, I daresay. Poor Harold, who was to

have become a Q.C.!"

"When I told him of this fortune that had come to him, he immediately"—I invented this romance deliberately, for reasons which I am sure will be allowed to be sufficient—"announced his intention of paying off the mortgage with it, to begin with, and conveying the remainder to his father, in part atonement—atonement, he said—of the trouble and disappointment of which he had been the cause."

"Poor Harold! Poor Harold!" The sister dropped a tear of affection. "His heart is sound, then, still."

"He came over to England with us-"

"Where is he, then?"

"He would not come home. 'Perhaps,' he said, 'the time might come'---"

"Poor Harold! It is so sad, Will he not

write?"

"I think not. Well, Nelly, think of your brother as kindly as you can,"

"Oh, Tom, after this, can I think of him too

kindly?"

"And the White Lady? And the Bishop? And the General? They are all flourishing?" "Don't laugh at them, Tom. And, indeed, my

father believes in them more and more."

I found him in his study, his MS, folios on the table. I narrated the story in much the same

terms as to Nelly.

The old man was greatly moved. "They did not tell me this," he said. "They did not promise to restore my son to me. Thank God, Tom, I can now think of him without resentment. Poor Harold! Has he conquered his enemy?"

I thought of the white cheeks and eager eyes

in the cabin.

"We can but hope," I replied evasively.

"Of course," he went on. "I know who to thank." He waved his hand round the room. "I knew all along that They were helping you: I was perfectly certain that you would find him."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "if They had made somebody bequeath all that money to you direct,

it would have saved a deal of trouble."

He shook his head. "My dear Tom, you understand nothing of these things. Their powers are limited. For instance, many persons have money to bequeath, but they have children and natural heirs. Would you ask Them to commit an injustice, and to persuade the testator to desert his children? Certainly not. In this case They found a cousin without heirs—a rare person; They found him predisposed in favour of this house, and They stimulated him as They knew how. But Their powers are limited. They can only influence persons to actions which will not injure others."

He looked round the room. Heaven knows what he saw. "I thank you all," he said, bowing his venerable head. "I hope that in these folios"—on which he laid his hand—"you will not find

me ungrateful."

Nelly laid her cheek upon his head, and whispered something about the righteous man begging his bread.

I have only to add that Dick and I are convert-

ing part of the estate into a cattle ranch.

About six months ago I saw an announcement in *The Times*:—"On July 16, at Chicago, Harry

Camber, aged 28 years."

I suppose that the Colonel put that in. It was thoughtful of him. And now there will never be any reason to alter the story as Harry Camber's people heard it told, and now believe.

THE LIMNER'S ROMANCE

I

H E was received in a small room, which might have been the breakfast-room, by the Lady who had written to him.

"I am glad," she said, extending a frigid hand,

"that you have found yourself able to come."

She looked anything but glad. Her face was set like marble, with an expression which never varied; there was no sunshine in it; no possibility of a smile; no light in it: on the other hand, there were none of the signs of discontent or of rebellion. Life had no joy for her; that could be read in her face at first sight, and continued to be read whenever one considered that face again. A handsome woman, about forty years of age, dressed in black silk with a suspicion of widow's weeds.

The portrait painter was quite a young man, with a distinguished appearance, for which his ancestry, perhaps, were not responsible. He had a distinguished appearance, and he was acquiring a distinguished manner, with some air of dignity and the beginnings of authority—a most enviable possession.

"I understand," he said, "that it is your daughter whose portrait you wish me to attempt."

"My daughter. She is engaged to be married. Her fiancé is abroad at present, but he comes home in May or June, when the wedding will be celebrated."

In her voice there was perceptible a slight hesitation, as if she was afraid of something; or uncertain about something; or anxious about

something.

It was then about three in the afternoon of a January day. The place was a country house, not very ancient or picturesque; a square hall of the last century, adorned with a pediment and pilasters; in front a terrace; at the back, gardens; all round it a park: the house which we set down naturally to a county family.

The young man's spirits fell as he stood before his frigid hostess and thought of the bare hall in which he had been received, and his echoing footsteps, and the gaunt breakfast-room where he was standing. However, he had come on business, and there was nothing more to be said.

"I will show you," said the Lady, "the place which will be your studio. We must go at once

if we wish to catch the daylight."

She led him up a broad staircase to the first floor, and to a gallery running along the whole length of the house; on the walls were shelves containing books, protected by a brass wire arrangement so that no one should be allowed to read any of them; above the shelves were family portraits in oil, for the most part of very inferior production. He was about to add one to that family gallery.

"This is the library," she said; "I think you will find a good light at the north end for your studio. My daughter will meet you to-morrow

morning. Perhaps you would like to make your arrangements? Your room is the door next to this,"

She left him in the library: the painter got his easel from his room, arranged his canvas, and put out his tools at that end of the library which afforded him the best light. These little arrangements took some time; the early evening fell upon the place; he looked round when he had finished; being a portrait painter he was not in the least astonished to find the faces in the pictureframes beginning to assume queer shapes and strange expressions: some of them threatened vindictively-why? some of them scowled jealously -why? some looked pleasantly upon the young man-was it the jealousy of the artist? Observing these things he walked down the long room, his footsteps echoing behind him. He turned at the door and looked back: nothing is more ghostly than a gallery of portraits in the twilight. He shuddered and hurriedly walked out. It was then about half-past four; what was he to do till dinner-time? He stood on the landing of the staircase—Heavens! what a silent house! The silence terrified him; it got on his nerves; he went downstairs; he passed an aged footman who took him to a morning-room where there were books and a fire. This, he understood, was to be his own room so long as he stayed in the house. "My lady," said the retainer, "cannot bear the smell of tobacco."

A pleasant prospect! However, when one is on business— He shrugged his shoulders and sat down. He had a pencil and could amuse himself somehow. At dinner he was placed at the side of a huge table, at the end of which sat the Lady. The daughter did not appear. The hostess said nothing. The dinner over, she rose and bade him, ceremoniously, good-night. The prospect clearly promised to be one of excitement and adventure.

At ten o'clock or so he went to his bedroom. It was a small room, panelled with dark cedar beyond the power of any candles to light up. That it was furnished with a carved four-poster was to be expected. The young man put out his lights and mounted the steps by which one ascended magnificently to that bed. Heavens! How silent the house was!

The reader expects a ghost: it was quite the kind of house where ghosts are seen: old, and with broad corridors and stately stairs and panelled rooms and painted ceilings and ancient furniture. Moreover, the house was haunted by a silence which was supernatural. I am sure that the reader

expects a ghost.

There was no ghost; but there was a dream.

Among the family portraits in the library there was one which in the dim light of the January afternoon had seemed to start out of its frame and to present itself eager for admiration—a feminine thing to do; justified by the fact that it was the portrait of a woman. In his dream the woman of this portrait appeared to him—and spoke to him. "You are going," she said, "to paint my great-great-niece. She has got something of my face. Give her all my beauty and all my vivacity. No: not to take it from the thing they call my portrait. The limner was a coarse and common creature; he could not understand grace, and he could not recognise vivacity. You must take my portrait from myself—at once.

And, above all, remember the expression. Young man, you appear to be different from that limner. He got a guinea for the portrait, and lay at the village alehouse. Remember, I am all vivacity and sprightliness; and in my golden locks lie twenty thousand smiling Cupids, every one armed with a fatal dart; and my eyes are the eyes of Venus, Goddess of Love, soft and smiling, promising ten thousand joys—my lovers told me so. Come."

In the morning the young man was called at nine. He started into wakefulness, his mind aflame with the extraordinary beauty of the dreamwoman. He could not wait: he flung himself into his clothes and went into the library to see her portrait. There it was — the effigies of a beautiful girl drawn in a faithful, mechanical manner. But where was the sprightliness? where was the vivacity? where were the Cupids in her curls? and where were the eyes of Venus, soft and smiling? Alas! they were not there. Nothing was there except the regular contour, the oval face, and the curls: in the eyes reigned dulness; and the hairdresser, not Cupid at all, was visible in the artificial regularity of her curls.

His eye fell upon the easel which he had set up the day before: something was on the canvas: he walked across the room to look at it. Heavens! There was the portrait of his dream-woman, roughly executed in chalk. He looked at the thumb—yes—and by himself. A rough design, but it was there: and it was true: the portrait might have taken half an hour; no more: but everything was there: a face of loveliness unsurpassed: a look of vivacity extraordinary: eyes and lips and curls

that breathed love and sweetness.

This young man was not of a kind to concern himself with ghosts. He had no terrors of, nor any belief in, supernatural visitations. All he understood was that he had somehow been attracted by a portrait: that he had dreamed about it: that in his dream he endowed the original of this portrait with charms which she perhaps never possessed: and that under the influence of the dream he had got out of bed and actually, in the dark, rubbed into the canvas the face as he saw it, lovely and ravishing! "I've been sleep-walking," he murmured. "Lucky for me that it was only the library!"

He went back to his room in meditative mood. Sleep-walking is never a pleasant thing to think about: sleep-walking combined with portrait-painting is rather terrifying, If dreams are to be reproduced by the somnambulist, Heaven only knows what things may be depicted upon the canvas, or what charges may be brought against

an artist!

II

HE breakfasted alone. After breakfast he sent word to the Lady that he was at her service at any time that would be convenient. At eleven o'clock he awaited his sitter. By this time he had removed the canvas with the chalk sketch and had replaced it by another.

The Lady entered the room, bringing her daughter with her. The painter saw a girl, slight, fair, tall: she was certainly beautiful so far as features can make a girl beautiful, but there was a look in her face of settled despondency and permanent gloom. A girl of twenty-one or so ought

not to wear such sadness in her face; it is not natural. As the artist gazed upon the face he became aware of a wonderful resemblance. The features — the face — the eyes — were the same as those of his dream - woman. But not the expression.

The Lady did not introduce her daughter: she merely said, "Where will you place your sitter's chair?" She criticised the pose: she suggested changes: she was satisfied at last, and she took a

chair while the sitting lasted.

It lasted for an hour: then the girl rose, without expressing the least interest in the picture, or even looking at it, and left the room.

"What do you think of your subject?" asked the

Lady.

"She has a very beautiful face and a shapely head—unfortunately——"

"What is unfortunate?"

"Her expression. She is perhaps suffering at the moment. There is a melancholy in her face which would be fatal to her portrait—unless one was painting Ariadne."

"The melancholy will vanish before long. Meantime you need not transfer that part of her

face to the canvas."

"If you desire—if you wish—if you authorise— I will paint your daughter as she ought to be—as

she was, perhaps, originally-"

"You mean with vivacity and cheerfulness. My daughter is naturally the most vivacious girl possible. There are reasons—I need not state them—why this cheerfulness is for the moment—I do not say destroyed—rather—suspended. You cannot, believe me, put too much light and cheerfulness into her face."

When the Lady left him he took up the canvas with the portrait of the night upon it and substituted it for the doleful face he had just begun.

III

So the sittings began: so they went on, day after day, always the same. The girl came in with her mother, took her seat, and moved not so much as a finger while the sitting lasted. She took no notice of the artist, not even to recognise his presence: she paid no attention to the picture: she would not even look at it. For the rest of the day she was invisible. She did not appear at breakfast or at dinner: if the artist went out into the park or the gardens he never met her: and he never heard her voice or passed her in the house. Presently, he understood that the portrait was painted against her wish, and that she consented to sit only in obedience to her mother.

The mother, on the other hand, was most anxious about the picture. She watched it eagerly: she criticised: she questioned: here the light was too strong: here it was too weak: here she wanted more colour: but the painter could not possibly put too much sunshine in the face; too much happiness; too much joy. Her eagerness about the picture was certainly remarkable: it was evidently intended for something more than a mere

family portrait to hang on these walls.

Once the artist offered some kind of apology for the joyousness of the face: "I have made it too

. . too joyous perhaps."

"No, you cannot put too much happiness in the

face. Of course there is no such thing as happiness in the world—we all know that. But young girls sometimes dream of happiness. My girl did. If they only knew!"

"Pray," she asked after a pause, "are you

married yet, or engaged?"

"Neither-yet."

"You will be, sometime or other. You look like a young man who is born to dream of happiness. Then you will learn the truth—you will learn the truth."

"I hope not. I would rather continue in a

dream."

"If man knew woman he would hate her: if woman knew man she would loathe him."

"And this cloud of melancholy? do you think

it will vanish in time?"

"When young people know nothing of the truth they live in a Fool's Paradise. My daughter fancied herself in love. I only tell you what you must have guessed. Then she was as animated as you have represented her. She cannot put the dream to the test of reality: so she became sad. She has to realise the true meaning of life and its duties, and this makes her still more melancholy. In a few months, when she has learned what things really mean, the melancholy will vanish; and then the resignation which marks the average human face will take its place."

"Then what will become of the picture?"

"It will be, for her—and for me—a memory of the past. For another person, also deeply concerned, it will be a hope—never to be realised—of the future."

So she left the painter.

"You have been in love-very much in love"-

the artist addressed his portrait,—"and you had to give him up. Why? The usual obstacle, I suppose: want of money. Her Ladyship evidently expects much money. Where is the chap, I wonder? He ought to carry you off to Gretna Green. With such a face and such a look you would enjoy being carried off to Gretna Green. And who is the other fellow—the happy fellow who will look at this portrait and will expect you to put on these smiles and this vivacity? Happy dog! Happy-bride!"

IV

THE sittings lasted a fortnight. By that time the portrait was so far advanced that there remained only some part of the dress and some part of the background, which could be finished in London. The head and face were quite finished. And her Ladyship was satisfied at last that they could not be improved by any touch or any alteration. The girl's face stood out from the canvas strong and clear, a marked personality. She was perfectly happy: the world was, to her, the best of all possible worlds: her loveliness was of the kind that wants sunshine: in her hand she held a letter: the artist introduced this letter just to suggest the reason for her happiness, which was greater than could be accounted for by mere youth.

The last sitting came to an end. As the clock

struck twelve the girl rose and turned to go.

"You have not seen your portrait," said her mother. "It is going up to town to-day. Won't you look at it once before you go?"

She sullenly obeyed. Then she turned to the artist with a flush on her cheek and a new light in her eyes. "How dare you paint me smiling and laughing? How dare you paint me as if I was happy?"

"I paint your face," he replied, "as Nature intended it to be. You were made for happiness.

You ought to be happy."

"Made for happiness," she repeated, turning to

her mother. "Why am I not happy, then?"

"You will be," said her mother. "In a very few months you will understand the realities of life. They are position and rank, wealth and power. There is nothing else—believe me. All the rest is

will-o'-the-wisp."

She shook her head. "Take your lying picture," she said to the artist, "out of my sight. I should like to cut it to pieces and burn it. If life has nothing but position and wealth, paint me with despair upon my face. That is what Nature intended." So she flung out of the room. And this was all the discourse the painter ever had with his sitter.

V

THE artist took his picture back to London. He had had a curious experience. Here was a girl, it was quite clear, going to be forced into marriage against her will, and though her heart was given to another man. Not a meek girl who would sit down and do what she was told and then languish away: not at all: a girl who would make no disguise of her repugnance, and would go into her new life rebelliously—perhaps to end it disastrously. He looked at his picture. There was the look of horrible rebellion: of stubborn

resolution: the picture, as all good portraits should do, contained more than the painter had thought of when he painted it. "I do not envy the man," said the artist.

He sent it to the Academy. It was accepted, and hung in a good position; and the loveliness of the face caused a little crowd all day long to

gather round it.

Now on the day of the Private View, but in the morning, the girl's mother, accompanied by a gentleman, made straight for the picture. The gentleman was in all respects *comme il faut*: properly dressed: properly groomed: about thirty years of age: good looking, as men go. As he passed through the room one or two who knew him by sight whispered, "Lord S——. He's engaged to the girl of that portrait on the other side: very pretty girl: very good match for her."

He stood before the picture, but his face did not express gratification. He turned to the mother.

"This is tendered," he said, "by the fellow who painted it, as a portrait of Margaret."

"Yes. A wonderful likeness, is it not?"

Now if the painter had been present—unfortunately he was not—he would have understood certain things, for a heavy cloud fell upon the man's face: his lower lip protruded in very ugly fashion. "I should very much like, I confess," he said, "to see Margaret resemble this portrait. So far, she is as cold as ice; I didn't know she could smile. I confess that I thought I was going to marry a statue."

"You shall see her after marriage---"

"Yes, no doubt," he interrupted; "but I will see her like this before marriage. Since she can smile and laugh and be happy when I am not

with her, I shall make it my business to find out why she cannot laugh and be happy when I am with her."

With these words he left his companion and walked away. And Margaret's mother sank into a seat with white and terrified face. The painter had made her girl too joyous, you see.

VI

THE Royal Academy keeps its doors open, as

all the world knows, till the end of July.

It was in the morning of a day in the last week that the portrait painter of whom we have been speaking paid a farewell visit to the Exhibition. He had three portraits exhibited, and on the close of the Exhibition the pictures were all going off to their owners. He also had in his pocket a letter from the Lady—"DEAR SIR" (it ran),—"Will you kindly forward, on the close of the Exhibition, my daughter's portrait to Christopher Armiger, Esq., Bendor Mansions, River Street, W."

"Armiger," he repeated—"Armiger. There was an Armiger at Pembroke,—Christopher Armiger, too,—I suppose she has married him, and has now exchanged sadness for resignation in a world

where there is no happiness."

He made his way to the picture: it was the best he had ever done. "But there," he said, "I was helped by the most Providential dream. It isn't her face, it is the face of her great-great-aunt. I wish I had known the lady—but I do know her. I wish she would come to me again in a vision of the night: but she won't. Heavens! what a

face it is! Did one ever see more happiness in any human face? What did the mother say? 'Nothing but a dream. If man knew woman he would hate her: if woman knew man she would loathe him.' Now she is married with all her sadness upon her, and that heavy black cloud which spoiled her face. Who would marry a girl with all the signs of disgust stamped upon her, visible beneath the bridal veil. Armiger-Armiger of Pembroke-why, I remember now: he had no money: not a mag: he came up to town like the other fellows to make his fortune. Armiger,—there was another Christopher Armiger, I suppose." And so he went on in his mind, while his eyes rested with ever-increasing pleasure on the lovely girl of his canvas.

While he was sitting there, a couple came along and planted themselves between his seat and the

canvas.

"Do you like it, Christie?"

The painter started. He recognised the voice, which he had only heard once.

"Do you like it?" the girl repeated.

"Like it? Madge mine, it is splendid! Only, of course," the man's voice dropped, "it does not do you justice. Nothing would—nothing would."

She laughed. She turned her head to smile upon him. It was the girl of the portrait. And she had gone back to happiness of her former dream! Her face expressed all the vivacity, sprightliness, and joy that the artist had put into the picture! Wonderful! Then Christopher . . . who was Christopher? He must have been the first man after all, not the second.

"It is exactly like you, Madge," the lover, who was also the bridegroom, whispered, "when—that

day-in the garden. Oh! you were so full of happiness-and it made me so proud-"

"Foolish boy!" she said. "They say the portrait is like that of my great-great-aunt Dorothy. We have got it painted and hanging in the library. But the picture wants life. The original was full of vivacity and sprightliness. There were some verses addressed to her-silly extravagancies, you know. I've got a copy locked up somewhere.

> 'Venus herself is in thine eyes revealed, And every curl a Cupid keeps concealed."

"I must read the whole of that adorable poem," said Christopher. "Meanwhile we shall have the portrait all to ourselves in a few days."

They passed on.

"I wonder," said the painter, looking after them.

KERB AND GUTTER

CHAPTER I

In the small, cheap music-hall beside the public-house the usual East End throng were gathered. In the gallery were the boys and the girls with their sweethearts. Sometimes the girls paid when the boys had no money: there is no false pride on that score. In the body of the hall sat rows of working-men with pipes and beer, and the wives of working-men; small clerks were there also; mates of the ships, for it is a riverside place; and a company whose various occupations may be guessed as long as the observer pleases, because he will never succeed in finding out.

Among them, this evening, sat two of the upper sort: the company recognised them as "class": they sat together on one of the foremost benches, and they looked about them: they looked at the audience more than at the stage: they had come to that music-hall with the purpose of looking at

the people, not of hearing the songs.

Presently one of them got up. "We have had

enough," he said, "let us go."

"Stop for this next turn. See, it's a girl this time, sit down again. The funny man retires at last."

Amidst a rapturous shouting of "Liz! Liz!" the girl came on quietly. She did not bound on the stage like the ordinary dancing-girl, with a flare and a wave of the hands; nor did she swim on gracefully with a sweet smile like the singing woman. She emerged quietly from the side, looking very serious and rather anxious. She was quite a young girl, not more than fifteen or so. She was dressed in a short white skirt provided by the management, and in pink tights. She had not "made up" her face, so that she looked horribly pale in the strong gaslight; her hair and her eyes were black; she wore a terrible fringe over her forehead; and she had long white gloves hiding most of her arm: it would have been as well if the glove had hidden the whole of that limb, because what was revealed was red and suggested work with sleeves tucked up.

"Liz! Liz! Liz!" they cried.

"One of our gals," said a young fellow of the clerkly profession. "Two or three of them do their turn at the Halls. Liz! Liz! Liz! She's the cleverest. Listen! she's going to sing. She can sing too, and she can dance round you." The orchestra struck up a lively measure and the girl began. She had a rough voice, uncultivated but strong. The high notes were good and full, the quality of the voice was quite good, and she sang in tune.

It was a sentimental ditty that she gave her audience. When she finished they cried for more. She struck up a song of the comic kind. It demanded that terrible gift, the power of "archness." The girl tried to be arch: she was so young and so badly trained that the desired effect failed, but the people knew the song and bawled

the chorus, and did the archness for themselves. Then the orchestra played another tune, and she began to dance. It was a curious dance, apparently of her own invention. It began with the figure which you may see performed by the children in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane on the asphalte, to the barrel organ. This figure is the first taught to their elder sister in the *corps de ballet*. The girl on the stage went through it conscientiously, holding her skirts and pointing her feet quite properly. Then she changed her dance and broke into something very much like a hornpipe, or perhaps it was a breakdown.

"Liz! Liz! Liz!" shouted the enraptured company. She bowed gravely and retired. "Liz! Liz!" But she would not come on again.

"I told you," said the young clerk to his friend, "Liz! Liz! Liz! that she could dance and sing.

Now you see. Liz! Liz!"

"We have found an artist," said one of the gentlemen to his friend.

"Your geese are all swans as usual."

"With great gifts. If I know a voice when I hear it, she has one; if I can recognise a fine ear, she has it; if I understand dancing she is a danseuse. She looks artistic through and through. I couldn't see her finger-tips, but I am sure they have the true artistic shape."

"Go and make her acquaintance then, over a

glass of beer."

"She is the sort of girl," continued the man of observation, "that one would like to make a lady."

"She is already a lady. They are all ladies

except the men, who are all gentlemen."

"A highly bred and refined gentlewoman."

"Oh, come-come!"

"Take her out of this rabble." He looked about the room; his eyes fell on a lad behind him. "This noisy, vulgar rabble. Surround her with an atmosphere of gentle companions, gentle manners, gentle speech, gentle ideas. Train these talents of hers. Then you shall see the value of that heredity you talk about so much."

"Come," his companion took him by the arm, "let us catch a tram or a 'bus or something, and

get away west."

H

THE lad on whom the speaker's eyes had rested -a boy of strong and rugged features-a boy born in Yorkshire—listened hard and fervently, but after the two were gone, changed colour and was both ashamed and angry. For the first time in his life he learned that the people in the music-hall—his own people—were a noisy and vulgar rabble. They were veritably his own people: his brother he knew was in the gallery with his sweetheart; his sister was there as well with her chap; his father was not there because he was in the public-house. As for himself, he seldom came to the hall; home still remained his ideal place of amusement, because he spent his evenings over his books. He was on the lowest rung, but he was on the ladder which leads the fortunate to dizzy heights. In other words, he had already obtained one of the small scholarships open to lads of the Board Schools; he was working to get another; he had begun already to understand that there were possibilities for him even beyond the place and rank of foreman of works, which he had hitherto regarded as the crown of all ambition. "A noisy and vulgar rabble!" The boy read other books outside his technical subjects: he read all the books upon which he could lay hands: he knew what was meant by these words. He looked round him, the scales fell from his eyes, he understood his new position, his heart sank like lead, he was only one of a noisy and vulgar rabble.

He got up and left the "noisy and vulgar rabble" of the Hall; he walked home through the noisy and vulgar streets, where the girls screamed and laughed, and the lads hustled and pushed each other and the girls; and he saw that they were of a truth a "noisy and vulgar rabble." He thought how one scholarship might lead to another, the first for the lower kinds of technical learning, that which makes the good craftsman; the second for the higher kind, that which makes the foreman in the engineering works; the third—ah! the third !- of which he had hitherto thought littleit leads to Oxford and Cambridge, the teaching and profession of science, to the black coat and superior manners of a gentleman. So with a new ambition he reached his home, and seized his books.

III

SEVEN years later the girl strolling alone across the lonely fields was dressed with quiet taste which is not unusual in a gentlewoman. Her face, if a face can express the truth, was stamped in every line with refinement, culture, art, kindness, and all the womanly virtues, including the final gift, that bestowed by Venus herself, which makes a girl not only lovely and sociable, but willing to be wooed, and ready to sacrifice herself for the man she loves. No one would have believed that some years ago this girl had sung a fearful comic song and danced a breakdown upon the stage of the most humble of music-halls. She herself had almost forgotten the little episode in her history. It was so far away, she had been taken from her old companions so long, her name, her face, her mind, her manners, her dress, her language, had all been changed; it was only occasionally that she remembered vaguely the childhood spent in the streets, dancing and playing on the pavement, the constant unpleasantness of drink among the residents, the poverty, the unsatisfied cravings after food and clothes, the Board School and the teachers, -all these things had become like a dream to her, and a dream splendid with sunlit mist which hid the outlines. She was now the adopted daughter of a gentleman-none other than the man who had discovered in her the possession of those artistic qualities, who took her from the noisy rabble and educated her, and surrounded her with the atmosphere of the gentle life. And, as he said at the music-hall, "Where is your heredity now?"

She came to a place where a little stream ran babbling over the gravel: it was crossed by a bridge of a rough plank with an uncertain handrail. A coppice stood on either side of the stream. As the girl reached one end of the bridge, a young man appeared at the other end, and took off his hat with a smile which meant more than a simple greeting.

"You here, Mr. Rutherford? I did not ex-

pect-"

"I hoped to see you here this morning, I wanted to see you. I hoped that you would be interested to hear that I have got my First Class."

"Oh, I am so glad!"

"The rest will be easy. A lectureship, a professorship later on, a name in the world, the Royal Society." He was a young man with a very pale face, but it was full of resolution. "Are you interested?"

"Of course I am. Tell me more about it. Where are you going this morning, Mr. Ruther-

ford?"

"I am going your way. What other way could I go?"

He crossed the bridge and touched her fingers

reverently.

She smiled. "Mr. Rutherford," she said, "your

companion will have to go your way."

So she turned and walked with him—and lo! it was his way, not her own.

IV

In the evening the same couple were alone in the drawing-room of the Cottage: it was a long, low room, with the windows opening to the ground and looking out west to catch the glories of the setting sun. The room was filled with the usual collections. Water colours on the walls, curtains instead of doors, lamps, fenders and things of polished brass, bits of statuary, bits of carved wood, tables with books and music, a piano, rugs on the polished floor,—what more could one want to indicate culture? In the garden, outside, strolled a middle-aged man, cigar in mouth and hands in pockets. He glanced at the windows of the drawing-room with a curious look of gratification. "It will do," he thought; "I have seen for some time that it will do very well. I have always intended that she should marry and marry well. He is a gentleman born and bred, a gentleman to the finger-tips, and she-well-I should like to find any girl her equal, even one born on the steps of a throne with a coronet on her head." He sat down on a bench. Presently the girl struck a chord on the piano, and then her voice rose up—a strong, full voice, a rich voice, a sympathetic voice, a voice which was capable of hypnotising a young man if he listened long

enough.

"In the concert-room," said the man on the bench, "she would make her fortune; on the stage she would become the greatest actress of her time; as a musician—but she began late; as an artist but her conceptions are better than her execution; colouring splendid, drawing wants fineness. Marriage - marriage with a gentleman. What must we tell him? Italian parents? No near relatives? He must be told something — his people would want to know—there's the rub there's the difficulty. A girl without belongings except in Ratcliffe, a girl who might spring the most awful brothers and sisters upon her husband -but they don't know. An Italian Count-Marchesi, perhaps; South of Italy - Calabria, where no one goes. The deception is innocent, Liz is dead and gone. Elise married, the lovely Elise, with her Italian eyes and hair-inherited

from an organ-grinder: her music, her voice, her manners! He's a lucky man: he will marry the finest girl in England, daughter of a noble Italian family, my heiress—mine; daughter of my old friend, the Marchesi what?... Ah! she has finished. Now they will go on with their love-making."

V

THE girl rose from the piano. "John," she said, with a very serious face, "you have made me happy,"-we need not report his answer, the ridiculousness of the lover has already been so often illustrated, - "but I have thought about things since this morning, and, John, there is an end almost before the beginning. Hush! Yes! I know, but you must hear me out." She paused and looked out of the window while the tears crowded into her eyes. "John, I am not at all what you think me. You believe that I am an Italian, you have been told so, and a gentlewoman. You have understood so without being told-without being told. I am proud to think this, but it is a deception. I am not an Italian, I am simply the daughter of the poorest people in London." young man turned pale and gasped, "You?" "I myself, John, oh! my guardian has done his best to make me forget my ancestors, he would make people believe—but I must not deceive you."

"It isn't true," he said. "It can't be true. You

—you—the daughter of the poorest——"

"Wait," she said, "I will show you what I was." She disappeared, and in a few minutes came back transformed. She had on a short white skirt, and

pink tights, with white shoes and white gloves: her hair was done in some strange fashion with a fringe,

a terrible fringe.

She sat down to the piano, and played a few bars. "Now," she said, "I am Liz; Liz the jam girl; Liz, who is proud to do a turn at the Hall. I am Liz. This is my song." She began, in a coarse, loud voice and a Cockney accent, a coarse song, of which she sang one verse.

"Lord!" said the man outside, "what on earth

is she doing now? That is her old song."

Then she played a few more bars. "Liz used to dance as well. See." She performed a part of the dance which we have already seen on the boards of the music-hall. "I was Liz. Can you understand? You are a gentleman by birth as well as education. Perhaps you cannot understand."

"You are Liz. You are Liz!" he repeated with every external sign of astonishment, for he remembered the girl. Her song, her dance, the shouts of the people, and the words of the man who sat before him: the man who said that the girl might be made a gentlewoman; the man who called the company, including his own brothers and sisters, a noisy and vulgar rabble. The evening came back to him-the whole evening; the joy with which he heard the songs and saw the dancing; the shame with which he listened to the man in front of him; and the perception, for the first time, of what life might mean for one who could get scholarships and would work. "You are Liz," he repeated, gazing upon her. "I thought that you belonged-by birth-"

"You see I have no claim to that distinction. Therefore, Mr. Rutherford"—she held out her

hand—"Farewell! You will be a great man; there is nothing finer for a woman than to be the wife of a great man. But I will not go to you with a lie perpetually in my daily life. Your people shall not reproach me with deception as well as humble birth."

"They, they!" he cried—"you think me a gentleman by birth? Why, Elise—no, not Liz—Elise—Liz is dead and gone, I am from the same place as yourself; I remember you, the music-hall, the dance, everything. I was there—I was there when you sang that song."

"You?"

"I was there, I say. My dear, it was my own secret that I feared to tell you—mine. I belong to what they kindly call the Kerb and the Gutter, my dear." He took her hand, and held it. "It is my secret, now yours and mine; I shall rise in the world and anybody will find out our precious secret. One cannot hide it. Only the obscure and incompetent can hide such a secret. They will say of me, which is quite true, that I am but a Poly. boy with a scholarship. If they like to say of you that you married the Poly. boy, if they say as well that you came also from the people, will it hurt you, my dear? Will it hurt—any who may come after us?"

"John! Oh, John! we belong to the same people—but—after all—you will be a great man. You can marry where you please. Will you never

-never regret that-"

The guardian at this juncture pushed aside the

curtain and stood in the doorway.

"Elise!" he asked with parental surprise, for this young lady in the unladylike disguise was in the arms of the young electrician. "Sir," said the young man, "I thank you in the name of Elise for destroying the Liz that I remember of Ratcliffe, where I was born."

"Oh, Lord!" the middle-aged philosopher sighed. "What is the meaning of this? Why, I only made her a gentlewoman for her to marry a

gentleman."

"And John," said Liz, "made himself a gentleman with much the same intention, and now, after all, you see we are both contented with each other. Kerb and Gutter—John is the Kerb, I suppose, and I am the Gutter. Kerb and Gutter."

THE SHORT WAY

T

" DEAREST GEORGE,—I have been reading your letter over and over again. I have thought of nothing else since it came. So far, no light has come to me, even from Dreamland."

She was writing at an open window early on a summer morning, about four o'clock. It was the month of July: the window looked out upon an open heath, on which the rising sun was pouring a cascade of sunshine. She was clad in a light dressing-gown. Evidently she had begun to write this letter because she could not sleep. After these few words, however, she laid down her pen: she leaned her head upon her hand: she looked out of the window: her eyes became fixed and dilated: she was unconscious.

After a while—it may have been one minute or sixty—she dropped her eyes: she shivered: she looked round her with a bewildered look: she collected herself: she thought things out for a while. Then she took up her pen again and resumed the letter.

"Light has come, dear George. Outside my

window, as you know, lies Dreamland, where light always lies. Ever since I was a child I have looked out of this window upon Dreamland. It is not a heath that I see; but—what comes to me. Some people look into a crystal ball. My magic window is worth many crystal balls to me. This morning I said to myself, 'I will see how people make money.' So the heath vanished and Dreamland took its place.

"Dreamland is not actually the world as it is; but one has to accept it as representing the world somehow—just as in a piece of music you accept

the chords as expressing the emotions.

"In Dreamland I saw multitudes of people marching along in droves or herds: not in marshalled companies, but all going anyhow, men and women, but mostly men: each herd was separate from the rest: and every one was driven and urged along by a horrid creature armed with a lash, which she cracked over their heads perpetually, and sometimes cut into their limbs so that they yelled and struggled on. The herds were always losing individual members and always receiving additions: always some dropped out, either to die or to wander about alone: and always others joined. All pressed onward in the same direction. There were thousands of roads, and they all lay on a steep slope leading up a high mountain, on the summit of which stood some kind of building wrapped in a shining mist: and the mist so rolled about the slopes and rocks and forests and precipices that one could not tell how many out of any one drove reached the building in the shining cloud, or how they fared when they got there.

"I looked more closely. I saw that very few

arrived within reach of the brightness on the mountain: they grew old in the struggle, and were no more advanced than when they began: they grew infirm: they could struggle no longer: they fell out and sat down and died.

"Well, I looked and wondered what this might mean. Of course I knew it meant something, because in Dreamland outside my window I always learn the truth. And I was not surprised when I understood—understanding always comes to those who look on and wait—and what I saw were the callings and professions by which men try to get rich. Every drove or herd was one profession. No one could enter any but by strict rules for admission, rules and examinations and fees. And when one was admitted there were rules to lead him and to guide him.

"At first the sight of all these separate flocks made me sad, George, on your account, because I did not see any place for you—who have no money

for entrance fees.

"I looked again. I saw that there were detached groups which never attempted to climb at all, and never got any farther forward. The same monsters with the whip lashed at them incessantly, but still

they did not attempt to move.

"I looked again. I saw, then, how two or three, here and there, were unable, or refused, to join in any of the herds: how they wandered about: how they made attempts of their own: how they climbed rocks perpendicular, and struck across deep cañons: how one or two actually succeeded in scaling the heights and reached the summit, and were received within the mist, while their former companions were still struggling so long over the asperities of the lower slopes that it was

clear they would never reach the top. What did this mean? As I gazed, George, I began to understand. It means that there is always a short way to those who can find it. A short way off the beaten track. Perhaps a rough and a dangerous way. But still a way that does not want the rule and the order of the common sort. So I came back from Dreamland, filled with the thought of

the short way.

"What does a young man in your position generally try? His usual course is to attempt journalism or literature: he begins with the latter: he writes a novel, which leads to disappointment: he then turns to journalism: or he casts about for some of those desirable employments that the tender loving-kindness of philanthropists offers to the unskilled and the untaught: or perhaps he tries the stage: or he falls back upon such teaching work as is tossed in contempt to those who possess neither degree nor certificate.

"Journalism, literature, the stage—these are all beaten paths like the rest. Leave them alone, George. Find out a way for yourself. Find out how other men have struck out a path to fortune. You will have to go straight to the root of things. If you sell something it must be what everybody wants: if you exhibit anything it must be what everybody wants to see: if you want people to give you money it must be in consideration of the worth of money. Look about, George, for that short way.

"You have, I believe, about fifty pounds between you and destitution. Make it last until you find what you have been looking for. I know that you are ambitious—who should know if I did not? I know that your ambitions are far beyond ose of most young men: you want the highest dis-

tinctions, the finest career. You cannot have them unless you have money. I do not think you would achieve what you desire by literature or by journalism: you would suffer a thousand humiliations and a thousand disappointments: you would live obscure and die forgotten.

"Look about, George, I say, for that short way.

"And now I am going to say a cruel thing. I cannot bear to follow you anxiously step by step. I would rather not know what you are attempting or how you are faring. Let us meet after five years. By that time you will have made your attempt and succeeded—or failed. You are strong, George; you will not fail. At the end of five years we will meet again and you shall tell me your adventures. In the meantime, you shall not be hampered with any engagements. You are free. If I find you married or engaged, I shall be neither angry nor hurt. Meantime, I shall remain at home, and shall wait and hope.—ISABEL."

ΙI

IT will be understood from the manner and spirit of this letter that the writer was not very deeply in love with the young man called George. But she was his old companion from childhood, and she was interested in him, and he fancied himself in love with her. Young men are sometimes taken that way.

George received the letter and read it through, at first with something like disgust, for he loved not the allegorical manner. He put it down, therefore.

"She's been reading Addison," he said. "It's

quite the style of the Tatler." He took it up again. The parable of the herds and droves affected him not at all. But the suggestion of the short way presently began to work. He was a young man of resolute aspect-steady eyes, firm mouth, strong chin. He might have made an engineer, or a barrister, or a surgeon, or a Home Secretary: but certainly not a novelist, or a poet, or a dramatist. These inferior creatures have faces of a softer and more sympathetic mould. "A short way." If any short way could be invented which was not already known to the multitude! "A short way." It was the only way by which he could lift himself out of poverty: the only thing for a young gentleman of education and expensive tastes who does not possess the money necessary to enter a profession. "A short way." He folded up the letter and put it in his pocket, and became thoughtful.

III

Two years later, Isabel was walking down Bond Street. It was the season of pictures and Society. As she walked slowly along, looking into the shops, she met a string of the wretches whom we call sandwich-men. Formerly, people used to meet strings of slaves going to their miserable fate on board the galleys. The sight was too common to excite any compassion. Formerly, people used to meet the dismal procession of sheriffs, chaplain, criminals, and coffins on their way to Tyburn. Again, a sight too common to call for compassion. Now, people meet, every day, long lines of sandwich-men: they are quite as wretched as the galley-slaves,

and a great deal more wretched than the men going to be hanged. Yet no one feels the least compassion for them: they flaunt their rags and their misery before our very eyes, in the very midst of our luxury, in vain: no one pities them.

Isabel certainly did not. She walked past them, unheeding, until her eyes fell upon one face in the

line.

"George!" she cried.

It was George: thin and weak from insufficient nourishment: his clothes in rags: his eyes downcast: between two boards: his toes apparent below the boards. But in his defeat he preserved in his face something of his old air of resolution.

"Come out of those shameful boards," cried Isabel, dragging him unresisting out of the line.

"Come out, this moment."

She dragged him into a side street. He took off the boards and stood before her, unabashed.

"Oh, George!" she moaned, the tears in her eyes.

"Is this the end?"

"Not at all, Isabel." He replied quite cheerfully. "This is only the result of a false start. I tried a short way, as you recommended."

"Well? I do not want to know what kind of

short way it was."

"I am not going to tell you. I made a mistake, that is all. I thought that the world wanted justice and equity and honesty. They don't. I have been beaten this time. But I shall not make the same mistake again. Isabel, I am very glad that I met you. I am not too proud to borrow money of you. Lend me some."

"How much do you want, George?"

He reflected. "I can do what I want to do with sixty pounds."

She took out her purse. "I have seven pounds here in gold and silver. Take that for present necessities, especially boots. Oh, Heavens! What boots! Give me an address. Here is a pencil—so. I will send you a cheque for sixty pounds. Present it when you have recovered the outward appearance of a gentleman. Now, George, farewell. We meet three years from this."

They parted. George left the boards lying on the doorstep. Presently another ragamuffin came along and found them. He seized them: he harnessed himself with them: he marched off down Bond Street and joined the line, now certain of a shilling. Happy ragamuffin! Fate cannot harm him who is certain of a shilling.

IV

ONCE more Isabel sat at the magic window. Once more the heath and the hills vanished, and she saw again the hordes and herds driven along by the Creature of the Whip striving to climb the mountain of the Shining Mist. They interested her but little. She turned to look at the men who left the droves and the beaten track and struck out a new line for themselves. These adventurers interested her a good deal. She watched some of them. Presently she saw one who climbed along a steep slope on which no one else dared to stand. Every step he took upward loosened the rocks and great boulders, which went rolling down the slope, falling on the people beneath and crushing and killing them. They shouted to him: he made no reply: he followed on his way, getting rapidly upwards: the rocks falling under his feet as he marched along made the way easier for him: he paid no heed, though from below groans, cries, and lamentations from the dead and dying were plainly audible. But he strode on, and as Isabel looked the golden mist rolled over, and he was received within, where all the world would wish to be.

V

THE five years assigned for the separation came to an end.

Their letters crossed.

"I have a house," said George, "in Park Lane. Come to see me here."

They met in Park Lane. It was a really splendid mansion. Many a noble earl has to

put up with one much less splendid.

"I am very glad to see you, Isabel," said George. He was now big, important, and magisterial: he was apparently in great prosperity, if a great house, servants in troops, and other external signs prove prosperity. "The last time we met was not promising, was it? I am not too proud, Isabel, to rest the whole of my success upon the money you lent me."

"You are successful, then?"

George swept the room with a circular flourish. "What does this look like, Isabel?"

"It looks like a great success."

"It is a great success. I owe it to you, I repeat, not only for the money you lent me, but for the Short Way you advised me to find."

"Then you did find it?"

"I found two. The first led me to the sandwich-

boards. You remember them! The second led me here."

"I am curious to know more," said Isabel. Just then the vision of the man who tramped along the mountain-side, sending rocks and boulders down upon the people's heads, recurred to her, I know not why.

"My short way is most simple. I point out

other short ways, and I charge for admission."

"That seems simple."

"Every great thing is simple, but nothing simple is easy. I have been abroad, Isabel. I found a country where there are treasures of gold and silver and all kinds of minerals. I have acquired concessions and rights. I have come home, and I now form companies, to which I sell my rights. See? The whole world wants a short way, and I find one for everybody. That's all."

Again Isabel saw the man who sent the boulders

rolling down the hill.

"They buy your rights. They give you their savings in reliance on your promise."

"Just so-on the prospectus. It is perfectly

simple."

"What do they get in return—these people?"

George laughed. "I don't know. Most likely

nothing.

Then he was the man who rolled down the boulders and killed the people. Isabel turned very red.

"George," she said, "you are a robber."

"No. I am a millionaire."

She turned and walked out of the room.

George looked after her and lit a cigarette. "Other people," he said, "have said that; yet here I am, and here I stay."

MARRIED BENEATH HIM

I

"No, sir," said the elder of the two. "I cannot sanction it. The family is quite beneath us—quite. You must proceed no further in this affair."

"I am afraid that I have gone too far already."

"That concerns yourself," his father replied with dignity. "Harry, I have always insisted upon the importance of your marrying position — with money, if possible; but position as the first consideration."

They were in a small library or study: the windows stood open upon a fair lawn with a garden beyond. The place was shut in by trees, and might have been many miles from London, so quiet, so rural, did it look. It was, however, situated in one of the southern suburbs. The room was furnished with taste. A large study table, with drawers on either side, stood in the middle: there were book-shelves filled with books: there was a simple matting over the floor: flowers adorned the tables: papers and journals were lying about, and in a wooden arm-chair beside the principal table sat an elderly man of dignified and cultivated appearance, his features delicate, his lips

thin, his eyes keen. It was the face of one who brings to the commonest detail of life the same critical attention; who inhales the fragrance of a violet with the same demand for excellence as he brings to bear upon a glass of Laffitte. Beside him was a crutch: he was therefore a cripple of some kind. As he spoke, he rapped the arm of the chair with his knuckles.

"The lady's father is a clergyman, you say. Vicar of a newly built surburban District Thing at

three hundred pounds a year."

"That is true."

"The lady herself is an Art teacher. I really cannot sanction my son's marriage with an Art teacher. No. Not with an Art teacher."

"I don't see why. What is there in our own

family to prevent such an alliance?"

"Your grandfather, sir, as I have often told you, was a distinguished Indian official: your great-grandfather was a Waterloo officer. You belong to a cadet branch—if not the elder branch, which is disputed—of the House whose present head is the Viscount Rosherville."

"My fine relations are no good to me, as I do not know them. As for Elsie, her people are gentlefolk. What more can one want? Her brothers are doing very well. One of them is in the employ of the Charity Organisation Society."

"What?" The old man suddenly and surprisingly became purple in the face. "What?" he shouted again. He seized the crutch and banged the floor with it. Without any apparent cause he fell suddenly and unaccountably and passionately into a royal rage. "That Society!" he cried. "That Society! Why—why—why——!" Here he stopped. His words became inarticulate rollings

of thunder. He could not speak for the rage that

possessed him.

His son looked on, wondering what this might mean. He had never before seen his father in such a whirlwind of passion. Calm and critical, he was always above and beyond the power of any emotion.

"Are you ill, sir?" he said. "Shall I bring you

a glass of water?"

The old man recovered, however. He became calm again. "There are many mischievous things in this world," he said, "but none, I believe, quite so mischievous as this Society. It breaks up the most careful combinations: it pries into the best devised schemes. Don't mention that Society to me, sir—don't dare to mention it."

"Very well, sir," said the son quickly, for his father looked as if he was going off again. "I have

no desire to mention the Society."

"Well then, let us end it here. I cannot consent to your marrying this young lady. I want you to marry position—position and money—position especially—and influence. I am getting old now—and perhaps my intellect is not so—so subtle—as formerly. I do not expect you to carry on my work. All the more—for your own sake—marry money—and for these reasons—which you do not know—marry position. I have nothing more to say."

"One word—you speak of your own work—what is your work? You have never told me. You live in a good house and in good style. You have, I suppose, means—but what is the work of which you have spoken so often and so myster-

iously?"

"Literary work. Anonymous literary work.

Which will remain anonymous, my son," he replied,

hammering with his crutch at each point.

"As you please," said Harry; "but in matters of love I do not know that a man is bound to obey or be ruled by his father."

"Certainly not. Unless he gets his board and

lodging on condition of such obedience."

"I should be sorry to leave you alone. At the same time I must remind you that I am independ-

ent. I can find my own bed and board."

His father turned sharply in his chair and looked up at him. "If you persist," he said, with a look in his face that his son had never seen before, "you may lose a great deal more than bed and board—young man—you may lose you may lose"—he looked round and banged the floor again with his crutch—"you will find out for yourself what you will lose."

"I repeat that I can keep myself," said the son

mildly.

"You can keep yourself. What do you mean by yourself? Take care, sir; there is more than daily bread—as you will find."

"Well, sir, I am sorry that I have apparently

chosen a wrong moment-"

"Not at all. Not wrong at all. Understand me. You must marry money and position—money and position. The time will very likely come when you will want both. That will do, Harry. I need say no more."

The son walked out of the room. Left alone, the father turned his chair round and continued a half-written letter which lay on the blotting-pad

before him.

ΙI

THE son walked away disgusted and agitated. What did his father mean? Money and position? He was doing very well: why should he marry money and position more than other young men?

It was a lonely kind of house: his mother was dead: he could not remember her: they had no relations; the long connection of his family in India seemed to account for that: they had no friends: his father was a recluse. He himself had been sent to Marlborough, to Cambridge, and to Guy's: he was now assistant-editor to a medical journal and was really doing very well: there was no reason why he should not marry a penniless girl: he had many friends: he lived in chambers: he was perfectly satisfied with himself and his own success. As for his father, he had never shown any desire for his son's society: he sat all day long in his library: once a day a boy brought him the post-bag, and once a day took it back: he kept his own counsel about his work and about his affairs. And as for money, there seemed never any tightness, any pinch, any lack of money.

He sauntered into the front garden. He leaned over the garden gate, which was a nice old wooden thing painted green. He took a cigarette and lit a match. He smoked reflectively, being uneasy in his mind, and uncertain of the event. He had no intention whatever of giving up Elsie, and he was extremely vexed at his father's unaccountable

perversity.

It was a very quiet country lane, quite off the high road: he heard the footsteps of someone who was walking along the middle of the road. Had

he known, it was the footstep of Fate.

The footsteps drew nearer.

"Why, Ralph! You here? Come to see me?" Harry opened the garden gate invitingly. "Come in—come in; there is nobody in the house but the

pater. Come in."

The young man addressed as Ralph answered him with a look of blank bewilderment. "Do you," he stammered, "do you—is this—do you live here? Is Mr. Vincent Everest your father?"

"When I am at home I live here. Why not? A very good place to live in, too. And Mr. Vincent

Everest is certainly my father. Why?"

"And do you, if I may ask, actually—assist—

assist-your father?"

"No; I've got my own work to do. He would not thank me for asking to assist him. Does all his work himself."

Ralph looked more and more bewildered. "May I see your father?" he said, after a moment's

hesitation.

"Certainly. That is, I will ask him to see you." Then Harry remembered that only ten minutes before, his father had nearly fallen into a fit at the mere mention of the Charity Organisation Society, and here was one of those officers.

"By the way," he said, "the pater has got some prejudice against the C.O.S. He gets angry when

it is mentioned. But I will see him."

Ralph looked after him. The thing was wonderful. He had never dreamed of connecting Harry Everest with Mr. Vincent Everest. It was impossible.

Harry returned. "He'll see you. Come this way." He led the visitor to the study door and

closed it after him.

Half an hour afterwards Ralph came out. His face somehow proclaimed defeat, not victory. He

was a strong and well set-up young man with plenty of good strong common sense stamped all over him; but he was not exactly a genius in dialectics. And he had encountered a man who was. Therefore he was defeated.

He came out. Harry was still leaning over the gate. "Well, old man," he said cheerfully. "How

did you get on with the pater?"

"Mr. Everest," said Ralph, turning red all over—face and neck and throat and hands, "you will understand that under no circumstances will you ever be admitted to my father's house again."

He walked away as quickly as possible, probably because, if Harry had replied, he might not have

found a repartee.

III

HARRY looked after him and whistled. He could write to Elsie, of course. His father had been making some objection to the family. Ralph was offended: good old Ralph! Oh! it would be all right.

Then he heard his father's bell: one of the maids came out to say that her master wished to see him.

"Harry," said his father, "I told you that you would very likely find that you cannot quite keep yourself—meaning your whole self, not the self of bed and board only. I did not know how near the danger was. Unless I am very much mistaken the blow has already fallen."

"What danger? What blow?"

"You, my dear boy, have received an excellent education: you belong to an honourable profession: that is so much to the good. I suppose you can keep so much. But, my son, you are now about to lose everything else."

"Everything else?"

"Well—most things. Name, for instance; ancestors, coat of arms:" his eyes fell upon a very pretty shield hanging on the wall: "family traditions, pride of family, respect for your father—I really fear that even the Fifth Commandment will suffer, considering the prejudiced circles in which you live—"

"Tell me at once, in so many words, what you

mean."

"I am coming to that. A cripple is at a disadvantage in a world where one can only live comfortably by robbing others—don't interrupt, sir!" he added impatiently—"robbing each other. I rob, you rob, they rob. Else it's I am robbed, you are robbed, he is robbed. Don't tell me. When you send in your thieving bill for sawing off a man's leg, what is it but robbery? I say that I was a cripple: and a poor lad—down in the gutter—yes, down in the very gutter—Cable Street—Cable Street—Cable Street. Do you know where that is? On the other side of Tower Hill. There's a fried-fish shop on the south side with your name—your true name—not Everest—painted yellow over it."

Harry turned very pale, but said nothing.

"Well, I tried to chime in with the universal robbery: one must not be out of the fashion. But for some time I got on badly: had to sit and think things over alone—even in chokee—several times in chokee. But I persevered. And not to weary you, my son, at last I succeeded. And I have done very well; very well indeed for the last thirty years, by writing letters."

"What?"

"Begging letters. I write them very well. Here

is one, brought to me by your C.O.S. friend just now. The C.O.S. has been looking for me for a great while—well—the game is not over yet—and so I told the fellow. By the way, was that your girl's brother? It was? I am glad. That match won't come off."

Harry groaned.

"I have always made a point of writing such a letter as could not get me into trouble. Mine is the letter of a gentleman. I have studied the subject, and I know exactly what a high-souled gentleman should say under the circumstances. It is a gift, in fact. Nobody else in the profession has it." He stroked his chin with a complacent smile. "So I told your C.O.S. man. I have stated in this letter that my wife is dead-so she is: there was no necessity for saying that she has been dead for twenty years: she was my nurse, I say-so she was. It is quite true: I am a hopeless cripple—so I am: no need to explain that this is a lifelong affliction: I am a poet—if necessary I can produce a printed volume of verses-I cut them out of American magazines and put my name to them. I have a son grown up - so I have - no need to explain that he is a medical man: certain little comforts are necessary at my time of life-no need to explain that I am only fifty. I live in a cottage which I try to keep decent—so I do—"

But his son sprang to his feet and rushed away.

IV

HARRY went straight from his father's house to St. Aiden's Vicarage, the abode of his mistress. It was a brief interview.

"Elsie," he said, taking her hand, "I am come to say farewell."

"Farewell, Harry? Where are you going?"

"I don't know—I am going away—I think I shall never come back. I am come to say farewell for ever. It is all over, Elsie——" But still he held her hand.

"What is it? What is it? Oh, Harry! for

Heaven's sake, what is it?"

"I have made a terrible discovery, Elsie—more terrible than I can bear to think of—more terrible than I can bear to tell you! Ralph must tell you. He knows: he must tell you. Farewell, my dear!" He kissed her once—twice—three times, and left her.

In the evening he got a note from her-

"Ralph has told me all. My poor Harry! It is terrible—too terrible! I am not engaged to your father, however, but to you. No one shall know what Ralph and you and I know—that you are the son of this unhappy man. And I shall wait. If you feel that you can meet whatever Fate has to give you, with me for your companion, you will come to me and tell me so. I shall wait.—ELSIE."

V

FIVE years later Harry came back to the Cottage. It was in June, as when he left it. The roses were clustering about the porch. He entered the place: everything was perfectly quiet: he knocked at the study door: there was no reply: he opened the door and looked in: the room was exactly the same as when he left it, but the table was cleared.

There were no signs of writing: no books, no magazines: no ink in the inkstand: no blotting-pad:

the books were in their places.

He came out: he passed through the hall into the garden: it was neglected and overgrown with weeds. He walked into the dining-room: there was a woman's hat with her gloves. What woman? He rang the bell. There appeared a little maid who stared at him with big eyes. "Mr. Everest?" Why, he was in bed—always was in bed: he couldn't move. Nurse was upstairs with him.

Harry went softly up the stairs. Always in bed. Couldn't move. How, then, could he carry on his

accursed business?

He turned the handle of the door softly and entered. On the bed lay his father with closed eyes, his face waxen as if dead: his delicate, regular features made beautiful by the refining hand of sickness: and at the bedside reading to

him, sat-none other than Elsie herself.

She heard him, she looked up. "Harry," she said, pointing to the bed, "the past is really the past. It is gone and forgotten. You can speak to him, though he cannot speak or move hand or foot, or see anything. But he understands; at least I sometimes think so. He is asleep. He is—ah!" she sprang to her feet and bent over him in sudden alarm.

Harry caught the white hand and felt the pulse.

There was no pulse.

"He will understand no more," he said. "Elsie—you have nursed him—you have forgiven him: while I—I have only tried to forget him."





